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UFOs

All the best from *the Skeptic*

1986 - 1990

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UFOs

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&
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UFOs

Vol 6 No 3 - 1986

The South Australian "Crashed U.F.O." - A Final Report

The news media carried a report of an unidentified flying object which "crashed" into the sea near Victor Harbor, South Australia at about noon on Saturday, 24th May, 1986. Investigations reveal that it was either a bolide (very bright meteor) or a re-entry of "space junk". There are no indications that anything "crashed" into the sea.

This report is based on telephone interviews, letters, and on a review of press clippings of the incident from metropolitan and country SA newspapers/ and an inspection of about 25 SA and Victorian papers" In addition, fellow researcher Peter Horne of Adelaide spoke to the SA RAAF public relations spokesman Major A Reynolds, and the Victor Harbor police about this matter.

The story as pieced together follows.

At about 1200 hours Central Australian Time (GMT plus 9 1/2 hours) on Saturday, 24th May, 1986, an object was sighted by a large number of people, as it travelled over south-western Victoria and parts of South Australia.

Observations apparently began near Ballarat, Victoria.

A Mr. Brian Kelly of Ballarat was out playing golf about 1230 hours EST (GMT plus 10 hours) when he reported seeing a long silver rock shape with a red tail and fins on the back. He said he saw it for about 30 seconds as it shot from the south-east to the west. (ref1)

Football umpire Mr Oesmond Blomeley noticed a "big flash" in the sky at about 1228 EST from Ballarat. An object then streaked away leaving a vapour trail similar to that of a jet air-craft. (ref2)

A Oelcombe resident noted a fireball just above the horizon which disappeared into clouds in the direction of Smythesdale. (ref3)

Many observers in south-east South Australia then saw the object

At Thornleigh, Mr Neil Sutherland described it as a "tube-like object" with fins, which had red on it, travelling in a downward path, moving east to west. (ref4)

Senior Constable G Clemow and others at Beachport reported a large smoke coloured vapour trail in the sky. (ref5)

At Naracoorte, accountant Mr H Schedlich noted a streak of red flame, at an estimated 40 degrees above the horizon in the northern sky which left a white trail. (ref6)

At Beachport a local man noted for a few seconds what appeared to be a "falling star" high up, which appeared to burn up above the horizon. (ref7)

Mr B Orchard of Port Elliot saw a "spear" of gold and white flame heading downwards, apparently to him only some few metres above the sea surface. How-ever, a check by the local surf-lifesaving club revealed no trace of anything. It was close to zero degrees elevation and south from Port Elliot. (ref8)

At 1210 hrs CST a Mrs Thorn of Victor Harbor reported seeing a red "flare" near Granite Island to her west. Her husband got his binoculars and noted what seemed to be a red and white "boat" going up and down, which then was lost to view. A sea search by boats failed to find any trace of a boat in distress. (ref9)

Mrs Norman at Mt Gambier looked up and saw a yellow light in the southern sky, which had a round shape. There was a trail behind it. (ref10)

A Kingston resident, Mrs R Smith noted a round red glowing object with a white trail. It was noiseless. (ref11)

At Bool Lagoon near Naracoorte, Mr R Lockwood noticed a flaming white yellow object at about 15 degrees south which before extinguishing became a bright red colour. It had a vapour trail which remained in the sky for a long time. (ref 12)

Golfer, Mrs R Williams was at Lucindale, when there was a bright flash in the sky at 40 - 50 degrees south-west, followed by a vapour trail which remained a while. (ref 13)

Near Carpenters Rocks, Mr L Moore was sitting inside his shack when he saw a bright ball of flame trailing a "smoke" or vapour trail. Its path was north of east to west of south. (ref 14)

Victor Harbor "crashed object" story.

So where did the story of an object going into the sea come from? The Adelaide *Sunday Mail* newspaper carried an account of the event and in part stated, "A Victor Habor couple saw the object plunge into the sea about 5km from shore" (25th May, 1986). Their story doesn't go on to relate any such eyewitness observation but does carry the account of the Thorns (see above). However, the Thorns did not report seeing the object "plunge into the sea". It appears the "crash" interpretation was made from this observation. The time of the observation was some ten minutes after the others, thus this report appears spurious.

Other papers then carried the "crash" detail without any other substantiation. Nowhere else in the clip-pings reviewed does any eyewitness report an object hitting the sea.

Summary

Having discounted a "crash", what did in fact happen? The facts are:

1. The object began as a "flash" in the sky over western Victoria.
2. It had a long trajectory and was seen over a wide area.
3. It was not detected on radar.
4. There were no reported sounds, particularly no sonic boom which would be expected of a fast-moving low flying object hitting the sea.
5. There appears to be no eyewitness report of any object hitting the sea. The press reports reviewed certainly do not carry any, and the Victor Harbor police station confirmed that they had not received any such reports.
6. Contrary to media reports that a RAAF crew had sighted the object, the RAAF advises no aircrew had.
7. Dovetailing the reported observations, the majority fit a trajectory of east to west, most probably actually to the south of Mount Gambier, and nowhere near Victor Harbor.
8. The object had the appearance (apart from two reports of "fins") of a typical daylight bolide. (See the Condon Report pages 567-577 concerning observations of a satellite re-entry and reports of rocket shape, windows, etc.)
9. There were no observations located in the Kangaroo Island or west coast newspapers in SA.

Conclusion

The evidence gathered is highly suggestive of the object having been either a bolide or a "space junk" re-entry.

References

1. *Courier* (Ballarat) , 27/5/86, p5.
2. ibid.
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4. *Sunday Mail* (Adelaide) , 25/5/86, pl.
5. *Sun* (Melbourne) , 26/5/86, p3.
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15. Condon, EU, *Scientific Study of UFOs*, New York, Bantam, 1968.

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A UFO Has Landed - A Satire

Dr Anthony Wheeler

A UFO landed in Brisbane's city centre early this morning.

The Aliens announced that they would lead Queensland forward into a grand new age of superior technology, an advanced civilization.

Your reporter was on the spot within minutes to join the handful of spectators. A passing Pie 'n Chips van stopped.

The Premier of Queensland held a press conference. The Premier repeated that he already knows what is best for the people of Queensland. He suggested that the Alien Visitors should offer their services to the Federal Government, who in his opinion need all the help that they can get. The Visitors from Space demonstrated their awesome power by vaporising a City Council bus that had been parked nearby. The Aliens promised that with their advanced knowledge and equipment, Queenslanders, under their leadership, would rise to dominate the world.

The police said that traffic was flowing freely around the obstruction.

In a telephone interview, famous skeptic James

Randi said that such a demonstration wasn't valid if a magician hadn't been present as observer to watch for any trickery.

A traffic warden remembered Dick Smith's publicity stunt taking a pogo stick over the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and zealously wrote out a parking ticket for standing the flying saucer in a no-waiting zone. Colleagues said that the man wasn't noted for his sense of humour.

The Aliens' reply was difficult to understand; apparently some of the emotional content was lost in translation. There was something about their superior technology and wisdom, gifts from the stars, universal peace, and retaliation against recalcitrant worms. It seems that the Aliens don't have a sense of humour either.

The police said that they would take no action unless there was damage to property. (Other than any accidents to old, historic buildings, of course.)

The army was telephoned. No one was available in the office at that time; the sergeant suggested we call back after the weekend.

The Australian Skeptics reminded us that they have a $20,000 prize available for the first claimant to convincingly demonstrate a psychic or paranormal power or event. The Skeptics would be most happy to test any claim that the Space Travellers might like to make. Perhaps they could send a proposal in writing, with a statement from a witness of their powers, to their head office in Sydney?

A man from the Brisbane City Council asked if they could have their bus back, please.

The rush-hour traffic proceeded uninterrupted.

A television news crew arrived and filmed the passing traffic and the small crowd of spectators.

One observer suggested that a UFO in the city centre would be good for tourism, and said that he wouldn't mind paying a couple of dollars for a guided tour of the flying saucer.

The Visitors replied that no grubby humans would be defiling their nice, clean, spaceship.

An old lady didn't think that the shining metal added to the city's natural beauty. An old man called it an "eyesore", and muttered something about the ANZACS,

The Aliens said something quite sharp about a new age of enlightenment, of peace and wisdom, of fulfilment and true equality, and about beauty being nothing to do with stone and metal.

The traffic warden couldn't find a windscreen wiper to clip the parking ticket onto. The police asked the little crowd to "Move along, please."

Someone called out a humorous reference to immigration requirements.

One of the Spacemen shouted that he wasn't going to stay there to be insulted.

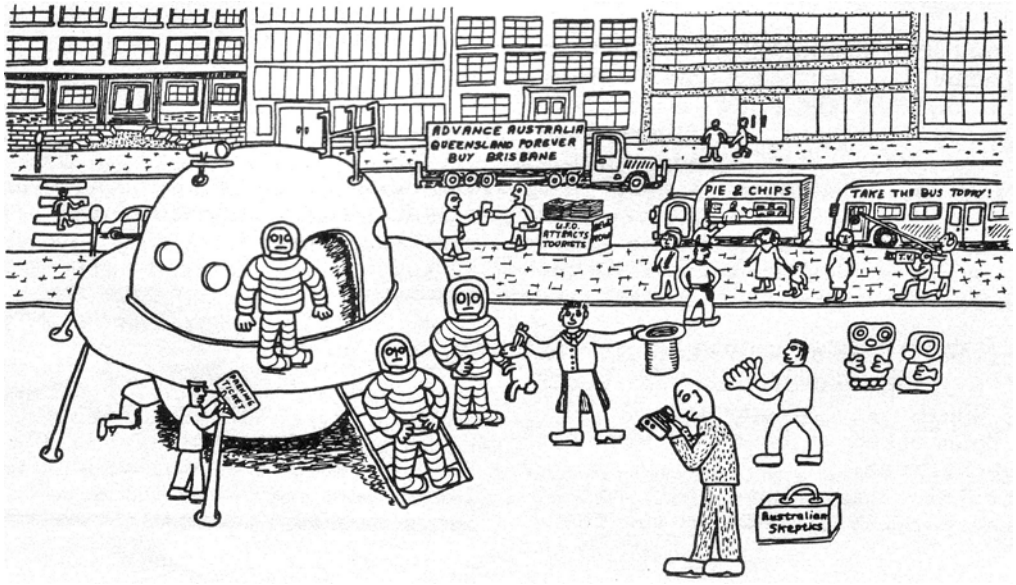
Phil Cass, famous local magician, arrived and pulled a rabbit out of a hat. (The crowd thought that that was nearly as good as making a bus disappear.) The rabbit foolishly hopped up the ramp and past the feet into the UFO; the Aliens got a little upset.

Andrew Fitzherbert, professional psychic and palmist, smiled at the frowning Emissaries and asked to read their palms.

The Spacemen refused to take their gloves off.

At a press conference the Premier announced plans to build Australia's first flying saucer factory at Kingaroy.

Australian clairvoyant, Tom Wards, had seen it all in the future last week, but hadn't announced it for



fear of frightening the Travellers in Space away; and could someone take a photo of him shaking hands with their leader?

The traffic warden returned with a roll of sticky tape.

Kisha, leading astrologer, announced that she would be predicting the arrival of the flying saucer in Brisbane live on TV that evening.

The Minister for Education pointed out that the lack of dust on the shiny metal of the spacecraft definitely proved that the universe was only 5998 years old, and challenged scientists to display the apes that the Visitors had evolved from.

The Spacemen asked people to keep their grubby hands off their shiny spaceship, and shouted that no one was making monkey out of them. (There were also muffled shouts from inside about a dirty wild animal in a little fur coat.)

The man from the Brisbane City Council tried to get around behind the flying saucer to look for his missing bus.

The Aliens' leader said that if the man didn't stop pushing him he would make the whole city disappear.

Phil Cass asked if he could have his rabbit back first.

The traffic warden gave up trying to stick the parking ticket on the feat ureless, shiny, slippery, smooth hull with sticky tape. He left in search of something stronger.

A policeman arrested a young man with long hair and faded jeans that had been looking into the police car.

One of the Australian Skeptics took a photograph, but, the flash caught the Aliens unprepared and frightened them.

Two policemen stood around glaring at everyone, keeping the peace.

The City Council man started crying; apparently the bus had been quite new and he had been rather fond of it.

The traffic warden climbed onto the back of the flying saucer with the parking ticket, a tube of Super Glue, and a determined grin on his face.

Andrew Fitzherbert announced that he could have predicted all of this.

The television news crew filmed a pregnant lady that hadn't tried to have an abortion and knew someone that grew peanuts.

The rabbit foolishly pooed in the clean spaceship.

The Aliens got very angry, stomped back up the ramp and slammed the door.

The UFO lifted silently, effortlessly, up into the air, and was soon lost to view.

The small crowd cheered.

Andrew Fitzherbert said that he had exorcised the spirits.

Phil Cass thought them pretty rude and when was he going to get his rabbit back?

The police said, "Move along now, please."

The man from the Council sat down and cried.

The Minister for Industry announced a $100,000 feasibility study to look into building a Space Port on Morton Island.

The Pie ’n Chip man closed up and drove off.

The Australian Skeptics said that it was all very interesting, but they would reserve their judgement until there was more evidence.

Rex Gilroy arrived with a cage for the tiger.

The police arrested the pregnant lady.

No one has heard from the Aliens or seen their flying saucer, or the rabbit, or the traffic warden, again. Rumour has it that they ended up in Canberra.

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Good's book isn't very

Barry Williams

Timothy Good, author of "Above Top Secret", was in Australia recently to promote sales of his book, which seeks to prove that the US government is in possession of several alien bodies retrieved from the wreckage of a UFO which crashed in New Mexico in 1947.

The truth of this extraordinary claim - and Good is by no means the f irst to make it - rests on documents supposedly released under the US Freedom of Information Act. Philip Klass, CSICOP fellow and leading American investigator of UFO claims, has described these documents as "clumsy forgeries". (Mr Klass has written in detail about his findings for the Winter 1987 edition of the Skeptical Inquirer.)

Mr Good, when challenged in the local media as to why the US government would sek for 40 years to hide the existence of aliens, explained it was to forestall public panic. This claim, in the nuclear age, seems to be somewhat naive. He was also somewhat unforthcoming as to how the US government managed to preserve this secret when it has been singularly unsuccessful in maintaining such damaging secrets as Watergate and the Iran Contra affair.

The Claims of Billy Meier
A practical examination of a 'classic' UFO case

Ben Harris

After ploughing through 265 pages of "Light Years: The Best Documented UFO Case Ever" by Gary Kinder, we come to the line "... the truth of the Meier contacts will never be known."

I find it most disconcerting that this statement did not appear at the beginning. It could have saved a lot of time, but it would not have made the people involved as much money.

Simply stated, the supposed evidence presented, dwindled away only to leave Meier's pretty, yet questionable photographs. The author, Gary Kinder, and his investigators have failed to prove that Meier is being visited by extraterrestrials. So, they are now claiming that the case cannot be proved either way. The more logical conclusion would be - Meier has pulled our leg.

The book with its erroneous subtitle takes the reader through the life of one 'Billy' Meier and his supposed contacts with beings from the Pleiadians. We are told that there is evidence, hard stuff that can and will, as the story unfolds, be examined by scientists. It sounds pretty good. Could there at last be proof (something that has been entirely lacking in all previous contactee claims) that Earth is being visited by extraterrestrials? Let's look at the Meier case. We'll study the photographs, the various sightings of the "Beamships' both by Meier alone and by small groups of people, and the 'evidence' - the supposed 'landing tracks' and the purported metal sample from the Beamship hull.

Background

Like other famous 'psychics' and writers of pseudoscience, such as Uri Geller, Ted Serios, Erich von Daniken, etc, 'Billy' Meier has led a rather rascalous life. He became known as 'Billy' due to his infatuation with such American west folk heroes as Billy the Kid and Buffalo Bill, thus displaying a bias towards fantasising.

He had spent much of his youth in and out of a boys' home (he kept running away) and quit school before grade six. He had been picked up for stealing by the police, he joined the Foreign Legion and went AWOL. After this, he returned to Switzerland and again to a detention centre. He's held many brief jobs, but nothing you could call consistent.

As a youth, Billy claimed to have seen a strange flying disk with his father. In 1944 a "voice, low and clear came into his head. This voice, he learned, belonged to Sfath, an entity whose thought transmitted teachings would continue through the summer of 1944.

It is interesting to note that Billy's claims are being retrospectively projected ('re'-jected) to before the first 'flying saucer' sighting in 1947. Naturally, these are safe tales because they cannot be disproved. St Elmo's fire, Venus and other natural phenomena have also been used in an attempt to create the illusion of predating Kenneth Arnold's original 1947 sighting.

Meier explains that one day in September he made his first physical contact. "It was three or four miles away [from home] behind a very big forest, a lonely place. There I saw something failling down from the sky, very, ve ry slow and it became bigger and bigger. It was something like a metallic pear." (Geller's first encounter with his space friends reminded him of a 'bowl' [fruit?] failing from the sky. Also, throughout "Light Years", we learn that Billy likes to perform Geller's spoon bending tricks and the compass trick. He performs these for believers. As these are tricks, it seems to show that Billy is indeed familiar with the principles of deception and "putting on a performance"!)

Meier entered the flying ship and was greeted by Sfath himself. This old being was to be the first of Meier's 'spiritual mentors'. In the 1950s, a higher intelligence would take over. As it so happened, in 1953 Meier heard a new voice in his head. She was named Asket who came from the 'DAL universe'.

Many years later, after more voices, Meier was to meet Semjase, a beautiful woman from the Pleiadians who would continue to contact him both telepathically and physically over the years to follow.

Since 1944, Meier has supposedly been taught the great truths of the universe by these visiting creatures. He has made notes that run into many thousands of pages. The apparent motive for the contacting of Meier by the forms of higher understanding is to impart special knowledge. These secret insights (Meier has not made all of them known to the world although he's been learning of them for many years) are supposed to save the world from destruction and ensure that the human race does not endanger other life forms in the universe. Most of the writings are just pretty phrases that echo long established puffery. One such gem is:

> "The eternal truth remains for all times the eternal truth."
>
> Asket

One would think that after all these years of learning from creatures intelligent enough to visit us from across

the great reaches of space that some truly interesting information would be imparted. Like all contactee cases, the information given does not substantiate the claims.

Well, one could dismiss his stories as being fantastic and either imagined or fabricated, but what of the apparently hard evidence?

The photographs

"A picture tells a thousand words" or, in Meier's case, covers a billion miles! UFO photos have always held a fascination. The press loves to run them and the history of the subject is replete with small, often blurred lights and objects that are claimed to be of extraterrestrial origin.

> "*To believe that UFOs are real suits the general opinion, whereas disbelief is discouraged. This creates the impression that there is a tendency all over the world to believe in saucers and to* ***want*** *them to be real.*"
> (Emphasis added)
>
> Carl Jung

Most of the photos turn out to be either deliberate fakes or simply just photos of a natural object under unusual lighting conditions.

Can a photograph of an unusual object be considered proof of its existence? I think not. You see, a photo is what is left after a three dimensional scene has been reduced to two dimensions. Distances and proportions become distorted as the dimension drops away. Your view goes from two-eyed (stereo) to single eyed (mono).

For example, the Penrose triangle is an amazing thing. It can be drawn successfully in two dimensions to represent a three dimensional object. However, it cannot be actually constructed in three dimensions, or the real world. It can though, because we drop a dimension in the photographic process, be captured on film.

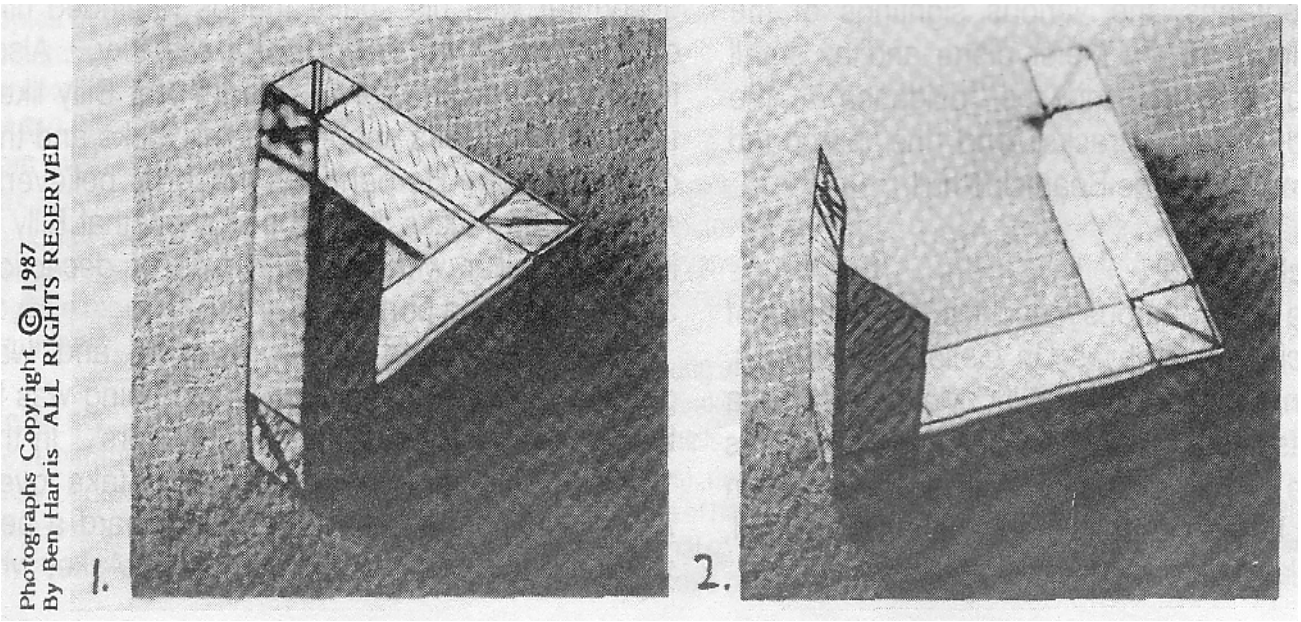
Photo 1 is a Penrose Triangle. It is real, in the flesh. However, it only looks this way in the photo. In real life it looks like Photo 2. Only by photographing it at the correct angle and with a single lens (one eye) does it appear to be a three dimensional object that is breaking natural constructional laws.

It is exactly the same with UFO photographs. A three dimensional scene becomes a two dimensional 'effect'. Size, shape, position and proportion can become confused.

Billy Meier's photographs are, according to the experts, some of the best ever taken. They are shot in the daylight and show what appear to be large space ships flying in the air. Most of them are sharp and not hazy as a lot of UFO photos invariably are.

Can such photographs be considered evidence of visitation. Under the circumstances, I say not. But, many people say 'yes'. To them, these are proof. How though, are the photographs examined to establish their reality? We'll look only at the Meier case.

Firstly, we must remember that the 'experts' who examined the photos in the Meier case (and in almost all cases) are not experts in deception. This is like the scientists who examined the fake psychic, Uri Geller, and claimed that he was genuine. They were not experts in deception and thus only looked for



explanations within their framework of understanding. The first thing that photographic professional Harold Proch did was consider that Meier's photos were montages. (This is an example of the photographer looking for an explanation within his familiar domain.) As we shall see, this is not the track to go down, although it is the track you're expected to follow.

Wendelle Stevens, a man with a great interest in UFOs and a huge file of 3000 UFO photos, was impressed with Meier's work. He looked, among other things, for rephotographing. Again, barking up the wrong tree.

We constantly hear claims that UFO photos have been examined with image processing computers and that these can rule out trickery. GSW (Ground Saucer Watch) is an organisation that has access to such equipment. A famous story within the UFO world involves them examining, at two different times, two shots from the same roll of film and declaring one picture a genuine UFO and the other a blatant fake. All with the same equipment.

In late February 1981, Eric Eliason of the US Geological Survey team in Flagstaff, Arizona, was approached to examine Meier's photographs.

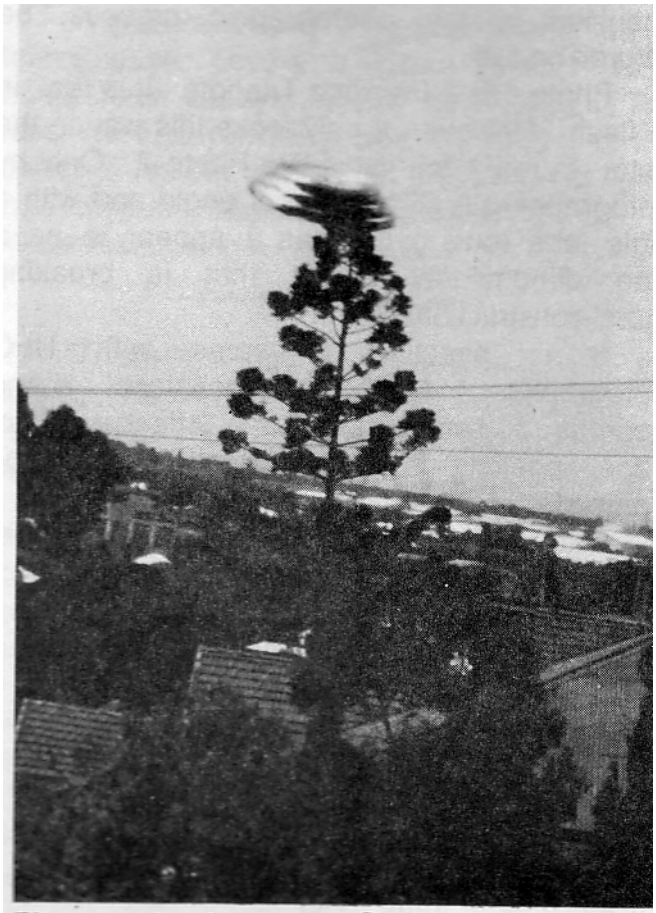
Eliason claimed his 'test' was "pretty sophisticated" and said that he couldn't imagine anybody being able to fool it. Again, here was a man attempting highly sophisticated tests to rule out rephotographing and dubbing. The obvious thoughts. However, deception does not run along obvious lines; if it did, no one would ever deceive anyone else!

After ruling that "We didn't see anything", Eliason claims "That doesn't eliminate the idea of someone taking a little model and throwing it out there ... That's a hoax, but you couldn't *tell that with image processing.*" (Emphasis added)

In other words, the sophisticated image processing test is inconclusive when judging small models thrown in the air or, I'd imagine, hanging from a thread.

But how could Meier have faked his photographs? Some of them even show a saucer passing behind a tree. This means that it must be large; it can't be a small model. (This is how the experts were thinking.) Expeditions were mounted to the exact sights of Meier's photographs. Encountered were steep cliffs and rugged terrain. How could Meier, who only had one arm and such a lack of education and funds, have created these photographs? It was a question that baffled the supposed experts.

Whenever Meier left for a contact (some of which would result in photos) he carried nothing. He just hopped on his moped and drove into the forest -although on page 9 of "Light Years" we are told that Meier



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towed a tiny wagon behind him. He couldn't possibly be making huge models and hanging them in the trees and no-one ever saw him carrying anything that looked remotely like a model - a hub cap for instance.

On investigating the sights where the photos were shot, Stevens and others confirmed that there was no way that Meier could have strung lines between poles or trees. The conditions and the terrain just would not allow it. And remember, he had only one arm.

We are often reminded of Meier's handicap throughout the book. It's as if this alone makes the man more innocent and less likely to deceive. However, as confirmed by Julios Kagi on pages 8 and 9 of "Light Years", Meier was very adept. He said he saw Meier rebuild a stone wall alone. "He was faster with one hand than other people are with two," recalled Julios. Other examples of his adroit abilities are also mentioned throughout the book.

Duplicating Meier's photographs

As Meier's photos seem to carry so much weight - to quote Louise Zinnstag, a big name in European UFOlogy, "His life story sounds so fantastic that I can hardly believe it. But one look at his photos reassures me every time" - I decided to attempt to create a Meier-like photograph.

The rules were to be simple. The photo must be genuine. In other words, it cannot be superimposed or created by montage or pasteups. It must be simple without using huge models or equipment. I wanted to simply push the button and have it work. As Meier stated in regards his photos, (I) "... push the button ... and it works."

The results are shown here. I'm particularly proud of my shot that shows the saucer passing *behind* the tree. To all intents and purposes, this demonstrated the technique used for Meier's "The Sunlight Scene". The object must be large and in the distance. It is, after all, behind the tree.

All of these photos were taken with a simple 35mm camera in about ten minutes. There were no elaborate props. In fact, everything required for the 'shoot' fitted within a cigarette case. The photos are not re-touched or tampered with in any way. The negatives are available for examination and full colour prints are available.

To top it all off, I shot the sequence with one hand behind my back, just to show that it could have been done this way by Meier.

How did I do it? The answer is contained in photos 1 and 2 of the Penrose triangle.

So, it is possible to fake photos of 'flying saucers'. They are genuine (from a photographic point of view) and they are simple to produce. They require no elaborate equipment and no special skills - and I do think I've successfully displayed that Meier's 'passing behind a tree' shots can easily be fabricated without trick photography.

Meier has faked photos of a San Francisco earthquake. That is established. What of his other photos? They can be replicated, as I have shown. This does not prove that Meier's photos are faked, but his history and the easy replication shows that this photographic evidence is not all that strong. Certainly not strong enough to confirm that we are being visited by beings from the Pleiadians.

Group sightings with (and without) Meier

Has anyone else seen Meier's flying spacecraft in the flesh? Or is Meier a sole visionary?

There are several instances where those accompanying Meier to a 'contact' have actually sighted a light or two. Not an actual Beamship, mind you, just a tempting hint that something was actually taking place. Within the world of deception (I'm a professional magician) these things are called 'fine-points' or 'subtleties' designed to enhance the over-all illusion.

Most of Meier's contacts happen at night, which is very convenient. In fact, we're told that they are happening more at night than they used to. Is it that the cover of darkness has become a requirement as investigators have gradually moved in closer?

In 'light Years", there are several accounts of others witnessing the night contacts. They were not with Meier, but observing from the outskirts of the forest at a distance.

Here's an example of what was seen at one such group sighting:

"High above the **tree line two miles away** they saw a **fire-red** disk 'as big as the headlights from a distance of one hundred metres'. After a few seconds a **rotating silver ball** spun into view, then two smaller silver spheres appeared beneath the first, also spinning. At the base of the central and largest of the spinning spheres, **a large drop formed and hung lower and lower until it broke free and plummeted. disappearing in two or three seconds**. Suddenly **all** of the lights disappeared." (Emphasis added)

Three weeks later, the same witness experienced another light show and commented about seeing a "glittering rain of fire failing straight down".

To me, the above description comes close to being representative of a fireworks display. If I hadn't been aware that it was supposed to represent a night sighting of a flying saucer, that's what I'd have assumed the

incident to have been.

None of Meier's photos, in their stark clarity, display any instances of "fire failing down" or droplets breaking off. Do they only do this in the night air?

I've seen fireworks displaying all of these traits - the spinning, the breaking free, the large drop forming, the instant disappearing. Could Meier have released some fireworks to help convince the distant observers. It seems quite possible and I know it's something I'd definitely do if I was carrying off such a hoax. Remember, the observers were at a distance. It was the middle of the night. It was damned cold (according to the book) and these people where *hoping to see something* . They did; they saw lights in the sky. But did they see a Beamship? I think not.

Daylight, multiple encounters in the Meier case were rare. There is an instance where Meier was obviously trying to impress Hans Schutzbach. Hans had been sceptical, but was at last to accompany Meier on a daylight contact.

"I put everybody in my car as usual," recalled Schutzbach, "and Billy went ahead on his moped, empty handed. He told us just to follow him, and he went every which way. Outside Hinwil we finally came to a little hill filled with trees. It was very *exciting*." Meier told them, "All of you wait here." Then *he drove off* (Emphasis added)

So again, the spectators were kept at a distance as Billy drove off alone for the contact. What did the witnesses see? It turns out they saw a little dot. According to Schutzbach, "I presume it might have been a balloon He took a photograph. "...the picture is not sharp," he explained. "All you see is a little dot."

A great deal has been made about Meier's obvious state of empty-handedness as he goes off for a contact. It would not, however, be beyond any man to carry a few balloons or fireworks about his person undetected. It is also possible, as I've shown, to carry all that is required for photographing UFOs in a cigarette pack. There is no need to carry a lot of equipment.

So, the group sightings at night resemble fireworks, and the daylight sightings have appeared to be no more than a balloon. There is certainly no evidence to suggest otherwise.

The other hard(?) evidence

It is important to remember that extraordinary claims, if they're to be taken seriously, require extraordinary evidence. Hearsay, inconclusive bits of business and uncorroborative claims are not sufficient!

Two of Meier's most striking pieces of evidence are/were a piece of metal that he claimed was from the hull of a Beamship and the spectacular landing tracks' that appeared on and off - usually just before someone of import was to visit.

The metallic triangle could have, once and for all, proved Meier's case. If it turned out that it was a metal of unknown origin or maybe bonded in a way not possible on this planet, the case would have been closed in Meier's favour.

At last, we would have had evidence, an artefact from another world. Naturally, the sample would have had to have undergone rigorous testing in a variety of labs with a variety of technicians in order to validate the claim. (The scientific method requires continuous checking, re-checking, corroboration, rejection, confirmation, etc.)

Well, what happened? You're not going to believe it, but the sample mysteriously vanished after being taken to the US for examination. It was under a microscope at one moment, and then "poof" it was gone. I mean, it's lost. What could have been the most incredible find in all of history simply just vanished! Rather convenient if a hoax was being undertaken.

One would have thought that the security around this sample would have been tight, but it was actually delivered to a scientist named Marcel Vogel in a padded mailer! To quote "Light Years": "One Saturday morning, not long after he had agreed to examine the Meier evidence, Vogel found lying on his doorstep a small padded mailer addressed to him." Can you believe that if the proponents of Meier's fantastic tale really believed the artefact to be genuine that they'd have delivered it in this fashion?

Anyway, the sample has now vanished (so the story goes), so it is another piece of supposed evidence that has blown away in the wind.

Landing tracks

Landing tracks, like the ones that Meier claims prove his visitations, have been around for ages. They have appeared all around the world, and there are natural, logical explanations for them. There are several natural reasons why tall grass can be mysteriously squashed down and swirled into a circular pattern.

One of the more usual forces to accomplish this is a stationery whirlwind that is often created at the bottom of a hill due to windshear. The shear creates the turbulence that can sometimes trigger the spin in the vortex and produce the whirlwind. The wind shear itself is created at the boundary between different wind directions, humidity and temperature.

These results, often found at the bottom of a steep hill, are impressive. An almost perfect circle cut into the grass.

For years, UFO proponents have attempted to use

this natural occurrence and its resulting 'landing patch' as evidence of alien visitation. For the very reason that Carl Jungexpounded, this belief lives on even after the event is explained away as a natural event.

Billy Meier's landing patches are a little different. They're still in long grass (do the aliens prefer a soft landing area?), however, they are formed as a triplet. In other words, there are three circles swirled into the grass, each one six feet in diameter forming a triangle. Could these be faked? And could they be faked by a man with one arm?

It is noted that there is only one track of foot prints leading to the Meier landing patches. No sign of any sort of machinery being taken in or out. The investigators on Billy's case could not conceive that the pads could be made without something large and maybe mechanical. Certainly, they could not be made by a man with one arm?

In fact, it is very easy to create these landing fields. It can be done quickly, and without anything large or cumbersome.

My experiments show that a simple piece of timber three feet long with two straps is all that is required. One strap, for the insertion of your left foot, is at the very left-most end of the length of timber. The other strap, for the right foot, is about twelve inches in from the opposite end.

This device can easily be carried in one hand. To use it, you simply walk into the field (remember, in Billy's case there was always one foot track) and place the length of timber onto the grass. You now insert your left foot into its strap - the left foot becomes the pivotal point and the right foot into its strap on the opposite end. It is now easy to 'hop' around in an anticlockwise direction to virtually craft a near perfect circle six feet in diameter in the long grass. The grass swirls in the anti-clockwise direction and tangles in the middle and around the edges. This tangling of the long grass ensures that it stays in place and does not rise at a later date. Also, because the majority of the swirled grass is unbroken and simply lying down and unable to rise due to the tangling, it remains alive!

After completing the 'swirl', you simply pick up your gimmick and either make two more, or simply walk off retracing your original steps.

The fact that the grass in the swirl fails to either die or return to its original upward state is thus easily explained as above. It is no great mystery, as implied in "Light Years".

Conclusions

So, we have seen that Billy Meier's evidence is certainly inconclusive. Nothing has been offered that confirms his story. Indeed, because he has faked a photo of a San Francisco earthquake and been caught with slides showing hanging models, it would seem that he has been cheating and fabricating.

The metal sample has vanished, and the supposed landing tracks can be produced either physically or by nature. Billy's photos may well be declared genuine in a photographic sense, but this does not prove that they are really photographs of alien space craft.

It seems that the opinion of many of his townsfolk, that Billy is a 'spinner', certainly applies.

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Ben Harris is a magician and skeptic, who prepares tricks for other magicians. He is also the author of "Gellerism Revealed", an investigation of the techniques employed by Uri Geller. A companion article to this article will be published in *Penthouse* magazine in March 1988, including reproductions of Mr Harris' 'flying saucer' photographs in colour.

Space terrorists

In a recent copy of "People" magazine, John Pinkney, author of the Pinkney Report, retells the story of the Canadian village whose entire population of 1200 was kidnapped by aliens in a UFO.

Quoting from a book, "World's Greatest UFO Mysteries" by Nigel Blundell and Roger Boar, Pinkney says: "The Royal Canadian Mounted Police conducted a massive, yearslong investigation of the case - but reached no conclusion." According to police records [three trappers] reported that the object (a UFO) 'continually changed shape'. Several days later another trapper, Joe Labelle, approached the police in panic".

True to form, Australian Skeptics contacted the RCMP, and got this reply from S.W. Horrall, historian for the RCMP: "For at least two decades, the Lake Anjikuni story has been appearing in various forms in a variety of magazines that specialize in 'unexplained mysteries', or `things from outer space'.

"Many years ago the members (of RCMP), then retired, who had served in the area at the time these events were purported to have happened (1930) were asked for their comments on the story. They could not confirm it, recalled nothing like it, and were astounded that such a ridiculous tale could be believed.

"Our files were carefully searched. No strange craft was even reported. No one named Joe Labelle ever came to the RCMP in panic about Lake Anjikuni. The RCMP did not send out any search parties. The only records we have on the story are copies of letters to correspondents like yourself informing the writers that the story is entirely fictitious. It has proven impossible, however, to put an end to the tale. It keeps reappearing in magazines all over the world." Just like 'People' magazine.

Vol 8 No 1 - 1988

The Nullarbor UFO

Tim Mendham, with input from Keith Basterfield, UFO Research Australia, and Ben Harris

We'll probably never know exactly what happened to the Knowles family on January 20, 1988 in the middle of the Nullarbor Plain - presuming that something, in fact, did happen. There is very little independent corroborative evidence to substantiate the claims made.

However, it seems to be the consensus that they experienced some sort of phenomenon with which they were totally unfamiliar, so for the purposes of this report we will look at what is claimed to have happened step by step to see what conclusions can be reached. On January 19, 1988, Mrs Faye Knowles (aged in her forties) and three sons, Patrick (24), Sean (21) and Wayne (18) and two dogs set out from their Perth, WA, home to travel across most of the width of Australia to Melbourne for a holiday (some reports said to find work). They were driving in a 1984 blue Ford Telstar sedan, with luggage, again according to some reports, on a roof rack. They decided to take it in turns at the wheel, driving non-stop in order to reach their destination as soon as possible.

At about 5am (WA time) on January 20, they were driving east through an area of the Nullarbor called The Basin, between Eucla and Madura, still in Western Australia. Sean Knowles was driving, but apparently all of the family were awake. Sean saw lights approaching from ahead, which he thought at first were those of a truck. Suddenly the light seemed to "jump about a bit", then it disappeared, and then reappeared. [Earlier reports had said that Mrs Knowles was driving, that the light had stopped in the road in front of them, Mrs Knowles swerved to avoid it, and "Sean later told police: 'It was a weird looking thing and we stopped to go back and have a look'." This does not tally at all with later reports.]

The driver of a truck, thought to be about 10-15km ahead and heading in the same direction, later reported that he had seen a bright light hovering over the car's headlights in his rear vision mirror. This is the only eyewitness, independent corroboration of the Knowles' claim.

Sean said later the light "looked like a spaceship". It was described as being bright and light with a yellow centre, shaped like an egg in an egg cup and about a metre wide.

The light grew larger and larger, disappeared once more, then turned up again behind them. It disappeared once more, only to appear in front.

Sean then pulled a U-turn and headed back west for a while until pulling another U-turn to return to his original direction. It is unclear whether this was done to evade the light or to follow it.

At one stage he swerved to avoid the light, almost hitting an oncoming car and caravan. The occupant(s) of this second vehicle have not been found, which is unfortunate as they too must have been able to see the light, had it been as described by the Knowles.

What happened next is difficult to put in order or even to establish with any certainty, as the Knowles' retelling has been confused and contradictory. The following events are claimed to have occurred, in no

particular order:

* Sean accelerated to about 200km/h.

*The light landed on top of the car. When questioned later, they said they did not see anything approach and land on the roof, nor did they see anything protruding front, rear or over the sides of the roof.

*A tyre blew out while they were travelling at speed; Sean braked the car to a halt.

*Mrs Knowles was sitting behind the driver. She wound down her window and placed her right hand on the roof. She felt something 'spongy' (some reports saying the actual hood felt spongy.). Her hand felt warm for a few seconds, then the sensation of heat faded (this whole incident was only reported later to TV interviewers; it was not reported to the police, Sean is reported later to have said "She told me it felt like a rubber suction pad."

*Members of the family wound down the windows and a "greyish black mist" came into the car.

*The sound of their voices changed pitch and appeared to slow down.

*A humming sound was heard.

*Sean blacked out for a period.

*They all became hysterical shouting and crying. "The dogs went crazy."

*They believed the car was lifted off the ground. However, when asked by investigators if they had looked out the windows and saw the car off the ground, they said they had not done so.

*The vehicle was dropped to the ground and the tyre burst.

When describing these event later, colourful and curious turns of phrase were used, which were made much of by newspaper headline writers. Mrs Knowles said she thought they were going to die. One other member of the family said "It felt like being in a 'time warp'". The ash dust or smoke that entered the car when the windows had been opened "smelt like death". If the quotes are accurate, they either imply a breadth of experience quite out of the norm or a preference for the type of lurid description found in pulp science fiction.

After a period of time, Sean stopped the car and the family got out and hid in adjacent scrub (earlier reports quoting Mrs Knowles had said they hid behind a tree, leading to much sarcastic comment in the media about a family of four adults and two dogs all hiding behind a tree). The light, object remained in the vicinity of the car and then departed. "It was still there, waiting for us, looking for us. It was up the road a bit further from us," Mrs Knowles was quoted.

Fifteen minutes after stopping they returned to the car and changed the tyre. Some reports suggested that the light then returned, scaring the family into driving off in a hurry, leaving the tyre jack behind. In any case, they drove the 40km to Mundrabilla, near the border with South Australia, where they stopped at the Mundrabilla Motor Hotel.

The Knowles estimated that the whole event took some time, although investigators from the Adelaide based UFO Research Australia have estimated that it was actually much shorter - merely a matter of a few minutes. This would be consistent with other traumatic events, where witnesses often overestimate the length of time involved.

The media rounds

At the hotel, they met Graham Henley, the driver of the truck ahead of them who had reported seeing lights above their car in his rear view mirror. He later said the family appeared to be in a state of shock. "...even their dogs were cowering in the front seat of the car ... The whole car smelt like bakelite or just like as if they'd blown a fuse ... A soot was all over the car and there were four dents as though the car had been picked up by a magnet."

The family then, strangely, drove 600km non-stop to report the incident to the police at Ceduna, SA. This meant they passed the police station at Eucla, WA, about 100km from Mundrabilla. Sgt Dennis Sutton of the Eucla police station was reported as saying: "We didn't and still haven't heard from them."

At Ceduna, Sgt Jim Furnell took their statement. The family was still distraught. He spoke with them for an hour and a half, he said. "They were physically upset as if someone close had died. They were convinced it was a UFO. I got the impression it was a meteorite. But you couldn't suggest it, they would have laughed at that." Mrs Knowles did not report about putting her hand out the window and touching something.

Forensic samples were taken from the Knowles' car by a Port Lincoln investigator who happened to be in town that day on other business. He did not impound the car. Sgt Furnell suggested the family contact UFO Research Australia, and made appointments for the meeting in Adelaide.

However, the story had leaked to the media, and the family were intercepted on their way to Adelaide. At the town of Wudinna, the Knowles met Frank Pangallo (or his representative) of Channel 7, Adelaide, who was acting on behalf of TV program *Hinch* at Seven. He reportedly offered the family $5000 for an interview, on condition they not discuss the story with any other media group for three months. Mr Pangallo was later reported to have claimed that the Mike

Willesee program was not far behind him, and the Knowles might have collected $20,000 had they been more patient.

Mr Pangallo organised a hire car for them, and arranged for tests on their own car. The car thus became unavailable for tests by the group from UFO Research Australia. After negotiations with the 7 network, Keith Basterfield and Ray Brooke of UFORA managed to spend three hours at the Channel 7 studios in Adelaide while the Knowles underwent extensive interviews. "Between interviews we managed to talk informally to all members of the family. No formal in depth interview was possible in the circumstances. The family was distressed and tired at this stage and told us they wanted a finish to all the television interviews," they said. "Following the end of the interviews at the station we sought our own formal in depth interviews. However, the family declined and then left for an undisclosed location."

This turned out to be the home of friends/relatives near Melbourne. Judith Magee and other members of the Victorian UFO Research Society (one of several quite distinct UFO research groups in Australia) interviewed the family in Melbourne.

Suzanne McDonnell, writing in the *Melbourne Sun*, said Frank Pangallo claimed to be in daily contact with the family. He said they had seen a doctor for stress and were distraught. They had to be sedated twice in the preceding week.

"He said they would still be far too traumatised to speak about the incident," she wrote. "However, I had rung the family 30 minutes earlier. Faye Knowles was in bed, resting, but Sean said he would be happy to talk about the incident if I was willing to pay for the privilege." The amount asked is said to be $5000. The Sun declined the offer.

Reports that the family had flown back to Perth, unwilling to drive for fear of a repetition of the events of January 20, were untrue.

Scientific tests

On Friday, January 22, the afternoon tabloids ran headings "UFO DUST 'UNKNOWN SUBSTANCE' - Police test results". The stories said that forensic police had described dust left on the family car (still in the possession of Channel 7) was an unknown substance. "An Adelaide police spokesman said extensive tests at their laboratories yesterday had failed to identfy it. They have now sent the grey-black substance to Adelaide University for further examination by scientists specialising in geology and biology", the *Sydney Daily Mirror* reported, the last statements obviously implying the matter may be organic in nature.

"That's all bulldust," said Supt Schulz of the SA forensic police (referring to the stories, not the material under analysis). Quoted in the *Melbourne Sun*, he said, "There were no volumes of substance at all on the vehicle. For interest's sake, we did take what we call a tape lifting and that's only a case of pressing tape on to the vehicle, lifting specks of dust and grime. I have the sample here and I've looked at it and read the report.

"All I have is two little slides with a miniscule amount of grime or substance on it. It's probably road grime anyway.... There has been no examination, there will be no examination." Therefore, the SA police had never tested the ash/dust, and had not discovered an "unknown substance".

In fact, the tests were done by Monty Luke of the Australian Mineral Development Laboratories (AMDEL), one of the country's foremost analytical laboratories, with a world reputation in its field. His report was that the dust was consistent with material from burning shredding rubber (the burst tyre) and brake linings, created by Sean's heavy braking at high speed. He said the dents on the car, where the object allegedly gripped the roof, had been there for some time and were consistent with wear and tear.

Theories

Various scenarios were put forward, both by pro-UFO bodies and sceptical groups, to explain what might have happened.

The UFORA was non-committal, stressing that "the physical evidence is not as strong as the media have reported and caution is urged until technical reports are in. At this date we are of the opinion that the entire incident is still open to a number of interpretations." The VUFORS compared the encounter with a similar claim in Launceston late last year.

Colin Norris of the Australian International Information Centre for UFOs was convinced the Knowles had had an encounter with a research vehicle from an extra-terrestrial mother ship. "They were probably doing scientific tests. I believe their experience is very authentic."

Frank Wilks of the Sydney-based Australian Institute of UFO Research wanted to hypnotise the family to find "important details ... buried in the family's subconscious". Hopping onto a current bandwagon, he said "I'm sure they could tell us a lot more about the encounter. We need to account for every minute of the incident. It there is a lapse in time that cannot be explained, the family may have been abducted and returned."

And if the plethora of local UFO research groups

was not enough, the Texas-based Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) pipped in with, "This is a very impressive case - one of the most important cases we've had in a long, long time. What makes it so important is the other independent witnesses. And the UFO did something physical to the car and then there is this residue that was left behind."

On the non-UFO researcher side of the coin, a variety of explanations were given.

The obvious first reaction was that the Knowles had seen the sun rising in the east, and through some sort of optical illusion (or simple misunderstanding) thought it was something else. Alternatively, St Elmo's Fire and temperature inversions were suggested as the source of the light.

Other more exotic theories were put forward. Glen Moore, lecturer in physics at the University of Wollongong, suggested a carbonaceous meteorite landing in the vicinity, accounting tor the glow and the smell (although that can more simply be accounted for by the burning tyre and brakes) and would be surprising enough to cause great trauma in the family. Prof Peter Schwerdttergger, head of meteorology at Flinders University, suggested a dry thunderstorm in which charged dust particles create a pall of lightning. The tine ash covering the car could be a product of the lightning (again, this explanation is no longer necessary) and the violent shaking of the vehicle the result ot the storm. "No doubt it you are in the middle of a fairly intense electric field, you're going to feel very strange," he said.

Other suggestions included willy-willies lifting the car off the road and undulations on the Eyre Highway which can cause a car to 'take-off' at high speed.

None of these non-UFO explanations can explain all the supposed events of the encounter, however a combination of them would easily account for all claims. While this might be considered too much of a coincidence, one should keep in mind that the Nullarbor UFO is extremely unusual, even in UFO circles - "one of the most important cases we've had in a long, long time".

Witnesses

Apart from the truck driver mentioned earlier, no-one has come forward to say that they too were in the vicinity of the Knowles and had also seen the UFO. Several people have also claimed (or convenien remembered) seeing unidentified lights in various locations throughout the country recently, one even on t same stretch of road, though not the same time as the Knowles. Very little has come of these claims.

The claim made by crews of a tuna fishing boat in the Great Australian Bight that they too had seen a bright light and that their voices "slowed a distorted" was also used to substantiate the Knowles' claim. That the crew's encounter took place half an hour after the Knowles' experience is irrelevant - there is way of establishing the exact time the events with any great accuracy. It could also be said that the two independent sightings are consistent with the meteorite hypothesis. might also be that the two sightings are of entirely different phenomena, and that their only relevance to other is in their timing.

Conclusion

The only facts that we know of are:

* The Knowles' car blew a tyre and there is evidence of heavy braking.
* The four members of the Knowles family (and apparently the dogs) were deeply distressed by some event.
* A truck driver, 10-15km in front of the Knowles' car, saw a bright light hovering over the Knowles' car headlights in his rear vision mirror.

It should also be kept in mind th the family had been driving all the previous day and night, and this might have had some effect on their ability to report an event clearly and without misunderstandings. There still exists the problem of what happen to the luggage on the roof of the car; whether or not there was a roof rack involved as well (which some have used to explain the dents in the to corners of the roof).

All of the rest is the unsubstantiated claims of the Knowles' conjecture and misunderstanding (in some cases, fabrication). That this constitutes one of the most important encounters with a UFO, as claimed by some UFO researchers, says more about the proponents of UFOs than of the possible existence of such phenomena.

That a US film producer is apparently interested in making a film of the event adds nothing to the claim, although nothing more has been heard of this.

Nothing has been said in this report about the possibility of a hoax. Most of those concerned, both proUFO and sceptical, have felt that the Knowles are not faking their claim, and that something did happen to them, although not necessarily an encounter with a UFO. However, with such little independent factual support for their claim, a hoax cannot be rued out, however unlikely it may seem.

As we said at the start, we shall probably never know precisely what happened in the Nullarbor Plain on the morning of January 20 . With the little evidence available to us, this is an entirely proper conclusion to reach, and though it may not be the most satisfactory, it is the only conclusion that should be reached.

Vol 8 No 2 - 1988

Philip Klass' MJ-12 Investigations

Barry Williams

In Volume 7 No 4 of *the Skeptic*, a brief reference was made to a book, *Above Top Secret* by British author, Timothy Good, which sought to detail the worldwide cover-up of the evidence for alien visitations to Earth. Most of this book consisted of unsupported assertions and its credibility largely rested with evidence that the author had allegedly obtained from "a reliable American source close to the intelligence community".

This same evidence is contained in a 35mm film "Top Secret Documents" sent through an intermediary to William L. Moore, co-author with Charles Berlitz of the book "The Roswell Incident". Mr Moore publicly released these documents in May 1987.

Philip Klass, chairman of CSICOP's UFO subcommittee, has investigated these documents. In a special report published in Vol XII Nos 2 & 3 of *The Skeptical Inquirer*, he describes the story as "either the biggest news story of the past two millennia or one of the biggest cons ever attempted against the public and the news media". Reading the report, one is left in no doubt as to which option Philip Klass favours and with little alternative but to agree with him.

The "top secret" documents from the film purport to show that an alien craft crashed in New Mexico in 1947, that US authorities recovered the bodies of four aliens from the wreckage, that President Truman caused a body, Majestic 12 (MJ12), to be set up to investigate the matter and that President-elect Eisenhower was briefed on the matter by MJ-12 in 1952. A further document was allegedly found by Moore and an associate in recently declassified USAF top secret documents from the time. This latter document is crucial in that it is claimed by Moore to be independent proof of the existence of MJ12.

Startling stuff indeed, if these documents are in fact genuine. Mr Klass' investigations however, produce damning evidence that not only are the documents forgeries, but that they are clumsy forgeries.

Mr Klass' circumstantial evidence alone is sufficient to raise serious doubts in the minds of any open-minded reader. He cites many actions of US government agencies and individuals that would be totally incomprehensible in the light of certain knowledge of the existence of aliens.

Far more damaging, however, are the seemingly inconsequential physical and style deficiencies in the documents themselves. Anyone who has had intimate dealings with government bureaucracy will recognise the importance placed upon style and form in written communication. Many governments, that of the USA included, issue a style manual which sets out certain rules to be followed. These manuals are updated from time to time to take account of new thinking.

Had the perpetrators of the MJ-12 documents had the foresight to research the changes in official US government style over the past 40 years, they may not have made the simple blunders that made Mr Klass' investigation and his exposure of their perfidy that much more certain. As in the best detective fiction, it was the little things that gave the game away.

As Philip Klass points out, normal civil communication in the USA uses the date style "November 18, 1952". On the other hand, military style communication uses the format "18 November 1952" (without a comma). In the briefing paper from supposed MJ-12 member and CIA director Admiral Hillenkoetter to President-elect Eisenhower, the dates throughout are a curious mixture of the two styles, i.e. "18 November, 1952" - military style with the civilian comma.

Here Klass discovered the first of a series of astonishing coincidences. In corresponding with Mr Moore, he found that Moore also used this incongruous dating style. Further to this, the proliferation of computers in recent years has led to an official style change, in which single digit dates, eg "1 August", have been written as "01 August". This was unknown in 1952, yet the Hillenkoetter briefing document uses this anachronistic style. Could the Admiral have been a time traveller?

By an even more amazing coincidence, Klass discovered that Moore had begun using this dating format approximately a year prior to his receipt of the MJ-12 documents.

There are other anomalies in Hillenkoetter's briefing. He signs his name in full, whereas in other documents signed at the same time he signs with his initials. He also describes himself as Admiral, where other documents give his correct rank as Rear Admiral (the military take a dim view of self-promotion).

These comments refer to the documents recorded on a 35mm film, mysteriously sent to Moore. The allegedly authenticating document, one that was discovered in some 100 boxes of declassified USAF top secret papers, only compounds the doubts about the whole issue. It purports to be a memorandum from

President Eisenhower's special assistant, Robert Cutler, to General Twining, chief-of-staff of the USAF, written on July 14, 1954. Klass has discovered that Cutler was outside the US on that date. The US National Archives has pointed out that every other document in the boxes that supposedly contained this document carries a "register number". By yet another strange twist of fate, this document uniquely did not carry such a number, and it alone, among all documents from the same alleged source, also did not carry an official watermark.

These faults are also apparent in President Truman's alleged memos to his Secretary of Defense. It appears to have been on a different typewriter from other memos typed at the same time, and the form of address he used to his cabinet member was atypical.

Coincidence piles on coincidence in this remarkable story. Philip Klass has conducted his investigation with all the thoroughness that readers of his books *UFOs: the Public Deceived* and *UFOs Explained* have come to expect. If the proponents of UFOlogy were half as thorough or half as critical as is Mr Klass, then we would be spared much of the unsupported guesswork that infests the field today.

We can expect the proponents of the cover-up to challenge Mr Klass' report. Some have already promised "more evidence" to refute his article. But we have been promised "more evidence" many times before. What we need to see, if Philip Klass is to be proven wrong, is better evidence. Thus far, it has not emerged and this reviewer will be astonished if it ever does.

The evidence itself and the conclusions Mr Klass draws from it are for more convincing than can be conveyed in a review of this nature.

Vol 8 No 3 - 1988

"UFO Cover- up" is TV tripe

Barry Williams

Anyone who was seduced (or, for that matter, reduced) by the TV promotions into watching a program titled *UFO Cover-Up Live* (7 Network, October 15, 8.30pm) would have been left pondering why so much money should have been spent for so little result.

The show, which purported to be beamed live from the USA (which meant that they were watching it on the West Coast of the US at three in the morning), consisted of a rehash of quite a few old UFO chestnuts interspersed with clips from a number of execrable 1950s "science fiction" movies. It did not appe ar to concern the producers that many of the claims made had been thoroughly investigated by such serious researchers as Philip Klass and Robert Sheaffer.

The central theme of the show was the supposed cover-up by the US government of the finding of alien bodies in a crashed space ship in New Mexico in 1947. This theory has long been propounded by William Moore and Jaime Shandera, and has been thoroughly exposed by Philip Klass as being based on forged documents.

Moore and Shandera sought to boost the credibility of their case by producing two US "intelligence officials", code named Falcon and Condor, who attested to the validity of the claims.

These two individuals were filmed in shadows with their voices electronically altered to "protect their identities". Some probably unintentional verisimilitude is added to their claims by the fact that one of the "agents" sounded a lot like Darth Vader.

The legitimacy of these two avian "officials" appears to depend on the testimony of Moore and Shandera while the legitimacy of Moore and Shandera's claims depends on the bird men - a nice little circular arrangement.

The testimony of these agents would shame a primary school student attempting to write his first science fiction story. Not only were dead aliens found but there have been three (or two, or many, it is a little difficult to tell) aliens living in the US, as "guests of the government". One is still living there, in a reservation in Nevada. They have signed a treaty with the US government who "won't reveal their existence providing the aliens agree not to interfere in our society". Not only this, but we are astonished to learn that the aliens eat vegetables, like strawberry ice cream, have sex organs and believe that the universe is a supreme being. It is difficult to convey in a summary just how much of this "startling" evidence came out exactly like puerile drivel.

A further witness was the man who, as a 12 year old, helped his father, the Air Force officer in charge of investigating the 1947 crash, to sort out material from the crash "in the kitchen at home". He claimed to have felt the material and to have known that ''it was not from this universe".

The thought of a US Air Force investigating officer taking home crash material from a mysterious object to be sorted in his kitchen by his wife and son, in 1947, during the Cold War, makes the idea of a 12 year old knowing that a material was not of this universe seem almost plausible.

Sceptical view

In all the two hours of this nonsensical and intelligence insulting program, sceptics had less than five minutes to present their rebuttal. So poor was the evidence presented for the thesis that the US government is covering up the presence of aliens, five minutes was probably sufficient time.

In one case, an expert photographic interpreter explained in great detail why a UFO photo was a fake. His argument was denied, with no details, by a believer. The presenter seemed to think that this resulted in a draw.

It was noticeable that, in a program that purported to be seeking the truth, neither Klass nor Sheaffer were interviewed. The only prominent UFO sceptic that appeared was James Oberg. It is difficult to believe that the producers would be unaware of these prominent UFO sceptics, and the fact that they were not included speaks volumes for the integrity of the program's producers. It may, of course, be that Messrs Klass and Sheaffer refused to appear in such an absurd media event, which certainly would attest to their good taste.

As the result of a phone-in, we were informed that 83% of an unstated number of callers asked for a congressional investigation of the "cover up". This is about the only part of the proceedings with which I could agree. I cannot wait to see the proponents of weird extraterrestrial hypotheses subjected to serious scrutiny in a proper investigation rather than having their views taken seriously in an uncritical program like this one.

This program can probably be best summarised by the phrase 'unmitigated tripe'.

Vol 8 No 4 - 1988

The Mundrabilla "UFO" October 17, 1988

Keith Basterfield

This is a report on an incident which occurred in the following circumstances:

Date: Monday, October 17,1988

Time: About 0100 hours CST; 1215 hrs Central WAT; 1530 hrs GMT October 16th 1988

Location: Commenced 35km west of the Mundrabilla road house, Western Australia

Duration: Uncertain, estimated 10 minutes.

A Mr Peter Chapman, aged 40 of Ceduna, South Australia, a driver for the Ansett Pioneer Coach Company, was driving a coach at a speed of about 100 km/h between Ceduna, South Australia, and Madura, Western Australia. He had departed from Ceduna at about 1830 hrs the night before with 25 passengers on board. He drove to Madura, had a 10 hour break and then returned to Ceduna the same day, during the daylight. He then proceeded on 5 weeks holiday.

The event as reported by Mr Chapman:

1. At point 1 on the map, he first noticed a bright white light to the right hand side of the bus, i.e. in the northern sky. It was "up in the sky". He did not alert passengers to the presence of this object at this stage.
2. When he reached point 2, the same light appeared to approach the coach, but only for a short period estimated as 3 seconds. He stated it seemed to "fly" or "drift" from the northerly position it occupied. It hovered in this "closest approach" position for the 3 seconds.
3. At this "closest approach" position stage, he estimated its distance as 150 metres, and that it was 20 metres above the ground. Size was estimated as 5 metres.
4. He woke passengers and had them look to see if anyone had a camera to take a picture of the object. He then noted that the same light now appeared to be behind them on the road. It was viewed through his rear vision (outside driver's door) mirror. He estimated it was then 1km behind the coach and looked like a bright white light. It seemed to follow them for about 8km, always on the road behind them.
5. He drove the coach round an S-shaped bend at point 3, and after taking the initial right hand bend lost sight of the object behind the coach.

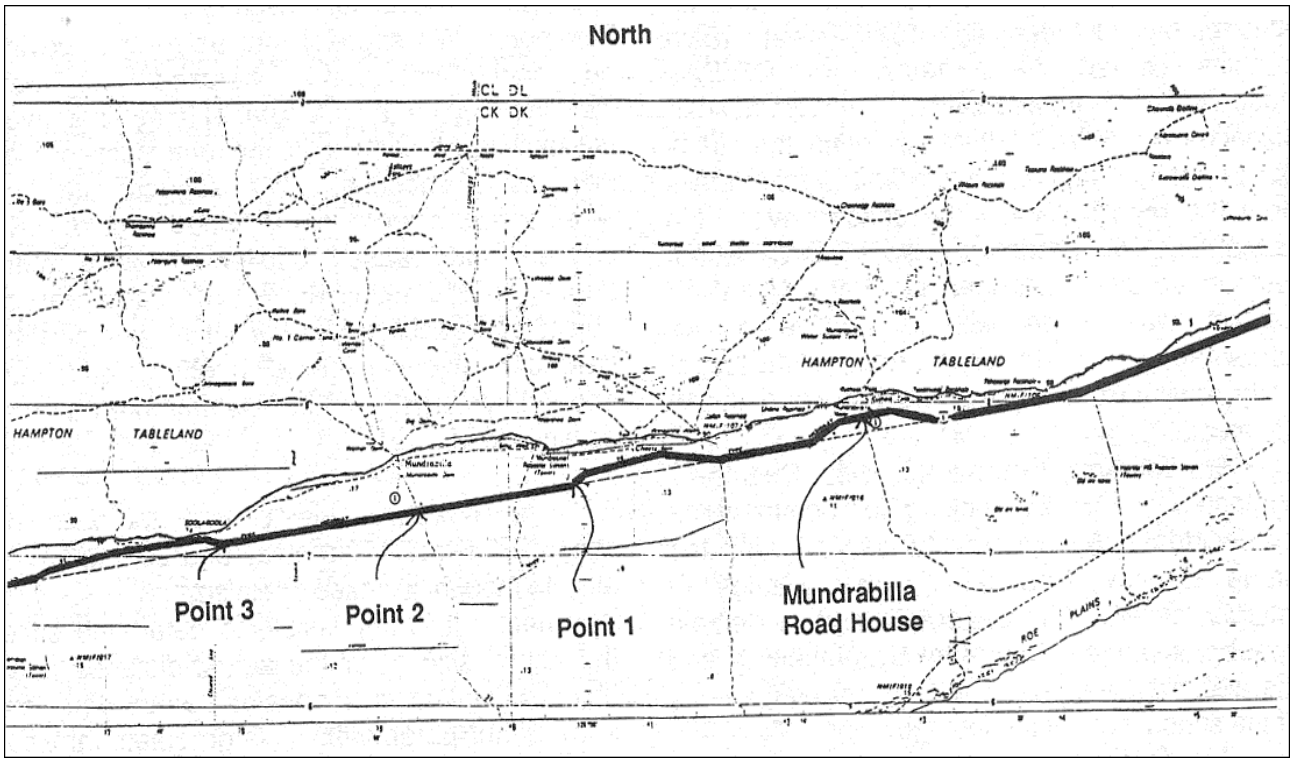
The event as related by a female coach passenger:

Only one passenger, a woman, has come forward to be interviewed. She stated that her attention was drawn to a light in the driver's mirror which she thought was a reflection of the headlights of a transport (truck) behind the coach. She said she didn't see the initial light in the sky or any other object close to the bus. She didn't believe they were being "buzzed" by a UFO, although she had heard of the January 1988 Mundrabilla incident.

Interview with Mr Chapman:

Additional points came out at interview with the author on October 21.

1. There were no physical effects on the coach. No



effects on lights, engine, etc. It was not lifted off the road. No unusual marks were found on it.
2. The only effect on the people on board was that they were "upset" and "frightened".
3. The light at "closest approach" did not illuminate the coach or the surrounding countryside.
4. No structured object was seen; it was a "bright white light" at all times.
5. Asked if he had noted two bright white lights to his right, Mr Chapman replied "No, only one". At no stage was the light ever visible through the coach's windscreen.
6. There was no sound associated with the object.
7. Although he had radioed on his CB to vehicles in the area, no one else reported seeing the UFO.

Weather and astronomical details:

Mr Chapman recalled that it was a clear night. Meteorological records were checked by Alan Brunt, ex-director of the Adelaide Weather Bureau. The nearest weather station reported that the night was mainly clear but with 1 to 2 octa of high altitude cirrus cloud. Alan said there was a distinct temperature inversion present and that "any light seen at a distance would have looked unusual due to this inversion".

The planet Mars was visible in the sky high to the north-west at magnitude -2.3. It is a bright orange colour. The planet Jupiter was some 25-30 degrees above the horizon to the north at magnitude -2.7. It would appear as a bright white light to the right of the coach.

Despite it being a clear night, Mr Chapman stated that due to the headlights of the coach he was unable to see any stars from his driver's seat.

Investigation:

This incident first came to light on Wednesday October 19, 1988, when radio stations carried news items. UFOR(SA) Australia immediately commenced investigations. The author spoke to the Eucla police station and obtained first hand details from the report filed by the coach driver. He found that Mr Chapman lived in Ceduna but had an unlisted telephone number. However, contact was made with a relative of Mr Chapman who promised to relay a message. They advised that he was no longer talking to the media.

On Thursday October 20, 1988, Channel 7 contacted UFOR(SA) looking for comment on the incident. An opportunity was afforded the group to view Channel 7's raw footage of interviews with Mr Chapman and a female coach passenger. This offer was taken up and the author viewed the video and secured a copy of the sound track of the footage.

Mr Chapman contacted the author on October 21 and an interview was conducted by telephone.

Analysis:

The most likely cause of the event was deduced from the first hand account of Mr Chapman.

1. He first saw a bright, white light to the right hand side of the coach, i.e. in the northern sky, when he

came to point 1 after a left hand bend.

Comment: The planet Jupiter was a bright, white light in the sky to the north at about 25-30 degrees above the horizon. Mr Chapman, when asked, did not see two bright lights to his north, i.e. a UFO and Jupiter. He saw only one and this is suggestive that he in fact saw Jupiter and not a UFO. The question can be raised as to why didn't he see Jupiter before this point? The possible answer lies in the fact that until this left hand bend the road runs close to a 100m high range of hills. At this point it starts to pull away from the range. It could also be suggested that cloud may have obscured Jupiter.

2. When he got to point 2 the light seemed to approach the coach for 3 seconds.
Comment: We suggest that as he was driving he could not have watched the light approaching for any length of time, not even perhaps have seen it in the one place for as long as 3 seconds. We suggest that the weather conditions, cirrus cloud, could have cleared and caused Jupiter to shine more brightly thus creating an illusion that it was an object approaching him. That is, because he saw the object become brighter, and thus apparently larger to him, he interpreted it as coming closer.

3. When it was at this "closest approach" he estimated it was 150m away and 20m up in the air. He thought it looked 5m in size.
Comment: It is impossible to determine either the actual size of or the actual distance to an object of unknown dimensions when you don't know either parameter. A large object far away and a small object close by can both cast the same size image on the retina of the eye.

4. He woke passengers, got them to look for a camera, then he noted that the same object now appeared to be behind the coach at an estimated distance of 1km. It appeared to follow the coach.
Comment: We suggest that there was no continuous viewing of the object, i.e. there was a break in observation. He saw it to his right, looked away, then picked up what he thought was the same thing behind him. He did not stop the coach at any time to watch continuously. We therefore suggest that he was initially watching Jupiter, then transferred his attention to the headlights of a following vehicle. Mr Chapman said he spoke on the CB to a vehicle behind him, but they did not confirm seeing a UFO. The female passenger actually said she thought it was headlights they were watching.

5. He drove the coach round an S-bend at point 3 and after taking a right hand turn the light was gone.
Comment: If it was a vehicle's headlights, then as they turned the corner the following lights would have not been visible to the coach. Why though would he not have seen the vehicle after they completed the turn? Possibly he and the passengers were too intent on getting to Madura; he did accelerate the coach to get away from the object. Perhaps the following vehicle pulled to the side of the road. Perhaps he and the passengers were too engrossed in talking about the object to even look. There are several possibilities.

Tentative conclusion:

Details provided are consistent with an interpretation that the driver initially viewed the bright, white planet Jupiter. The fact that he did not see Jupiter and a "UFO" seems to agree with this conclusion. He then seems to have transferred his attention to a vehicle's headlights on the road behind his coach. He advised that there was discussion about the fact that this spot was almost exactly where they believed a car had been "attacked" by a UFO in January 1988. This knowledge could have contributed to the misperceptions apparently involved.

Keith Basterfield is senior researcher with UFO Research Australia.

Things that Go Bump in the Night
Stealth Fighters, RPVs and Sky Spies

Gregory V. Czechura

Since mid-1947, when “flying saucers” first burst into media prominence and public awareness, a lot has been written in support of the “existence” of UFOs as a “real” phenomenon. Nevertheless, incontrovertible proof of their existence has yet to be brought forward, despite allegations that a number of flying saucers have crashed and been retrieved by the military forces of several countries.

Saucer crashes, although pivotal to UFO conspiracy theories, have not stood up well to critical examination; Philip Klass discusses several such claims in a chapter entitled “Crashed Saucers and Credulous Dementia Syndrome” in his *UFOs: The Public Deceived* (Prometheus, 1983). Nevertheless, I would like to

pursue a hypothesis that there may be some degree of "truth" in these claims, ie some observers may have found themselves confronted with unknown/unfamiliar objects or incidents.

UFO Crash/Retrieval: Patterns in the Evidence

An examination of Leonard H. Stringfield's "UFO Crash/Retrievals: Amassing the Evidence" (published by the author, 1982) was made to determine if broad, recurrent themes emerged from the crashed saucer "evidence". Specific details were not considered. This examination concentrated on the twenty-seven first person (category A) and intermediary (category B) reports that are the core of Stringfield's contention that flying saucers have crashed and been retrieved. As a result of this examination, eight significant characteristics were identified:

* All reports are anecdotal.
* Most reports are published for the first time, but only five refer to incidents less than 10 years beforehand.
* Crashed saucers or "alien" bodies attired in flight-suits or spacesuits are present in almost all cases.
* Military or security service personnel are present in all reports and specialist teams are present at ten incidents.
* Special equipment was reported in use by recovery teams at six incidents.
* Ten case histories cite the existence of secret installations or high security areas at existing military bases.
* Twenty-three reports involve security warnings, men-in-black, mysterious disappearances or interference with mail or personal effects (including Stringfield's correspondence with sources).
* A number of these reports specifically refer to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB) in Ohio, although Grey AFB in Texas, and facilities at Big Springs, Texas, are mentioned in addition to several museums, hospitals and medical centres.

The first two points do little to inspire confidence in Stringfield's reports for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, if the reports are to some degree "truthful", we are dealing with a category of military activity that exhibits the following features:

a) involvement with unusual or unconventional "aircraft"
b) crashes (with loss of life in some instances) of these
c) investigation by military and/or specialist personnel
d) secret or high security support installations, and
e) some form of punishment for security violations.

Is there some evidence that programs exist which possess such characteristics?

Perhaps a clue lies in Stringfield's book through his emphasis on Wright-Patterson AFB (Stringfield is an Ohio resident, so in one respect such emphasis is not surprising). However, among the various functions of Wright-Patterson AFB is its role as an Air Force Systems Command (AFSC) base.

AFSC is responsible for research and development, including testing of aircraft, avionics, spacecraft and missiles. AFSC facilities at Wright-Patterson include the Wright Aeronautical Laboratories, Foreign Technology Division and Aeronautical Systems Division (source: B. Yenne, "The History of The United States Air Force", Bison Books, 1984). Two other notable AFSC facilities are Tonopah (Groom Lake) range, Nevada, and Edwards AFB, California.

This suggests an intriguing possibility; claims of crashed saucers may in fact be misinterpretations or misrepresentations of covert military operations - particularly those associated with research and development.

It will be shown below that unconventional aircraft have been indeed developed by the military and that evidence exists, in the public domain, of incidents involving such aircraft that contain most or all of the attributes of saucer crashes. Also certain covert military operations of a more conventional kind may also contain significant features of the crashed saucer "phenomenon".

Unconventional aircraft

Conventional aircraft may be perceived under appropriate conditions (e.g. Chuck Yeager and Leo Janos, "Yeager", Arrow, 1976: p.33). The potential for misperception of unconventional aircraft, especially where radical designs are involved, is much greater. Military aviation contains many examples of unconventional design and some examples are outlined below. Development of those aircraft may be a lengthy process, and it must be always borne in mind that final operational designs will have passed through many stages and sometimes contain elements of "failed" past projects.

For example, Lockheed's SR-71 Blackbird went into service with the USAF in 1965 with the 4200th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, but aspects of its

development can be traced to the curtailed CL-325 project of 1955.

The late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s saw many major military aviation projects in operation tnote: all but five of Stringfield's case histories come from this period). Radical designs, some of which were legacies of World War II designs, were tested during this time and the aircraft developed by a number of German design bureaux are of particular note because of their major innovations. Examples include:

1. "Flying wing" configurations - Gotha Go229
2. Delta configurations - Lippisch DM-1 research glider
3. Forward-swept wing configurations - Junkers Ju287
4. Tandem aircraft - Heinkel Hell IZ-15. "Push-pull" aircraft - Dornier Do335 6. "Crescent wing" layout - Arado Ar234-V16.

In addition, a number of fanciful and quite absurd projects were also found to be under "consideration" by the Germans - there are possibly apocryphal stories of flying saucer projects - while some of the projects successfully tested by the Germans were under consideration or early testing by the Allies (for example, in the United States as early as 1940 designers were attempting to develop a strategic bomber using the "flying wing" configuration).

The significance of the World War II German projects can not be underestimated. Early USAF investigations of UFOs certainly examined the possibility that some of these designs may have been successfully developed by other powers, especially the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the United States was pursuing research of its own on both captured German aircraft (including operational types and prototypes) and war-time research: the first jet powered delta-wing aircraft to fly (Convair XF92A) resulted from successful exploitation of wartime German research projects.

It is not my intention to catalogue or describe in detail the various prototypes tested during this time. But I will outline several of the more bizarre designs which should serve to illustrate the diversity of aircraft types under investigation.

McDonnell XF-85 (Goblin). This was an egg shaped, back-swept wing fighter with an unusual tail layout (Figure 1e). The Goblin was intended to be carried by large strategic bombers for self-defence. Although successfully flight tested, major problems were experienced in docking with bomber's trapeze on return and development was eventually cancelled.

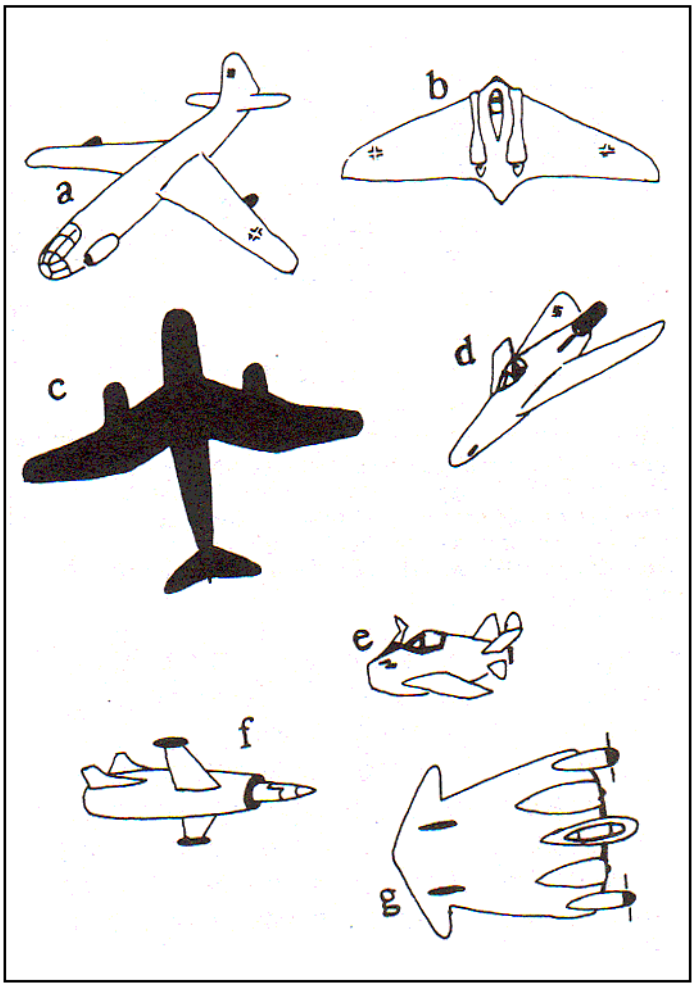


Figure 1. Unconventional aircraft designs of the 1940s and 1950s: (a) Junkers Ju287; (b) Gotha Go229; (c) Arado Ar234-V16; (d) Focke-Wulf Ta283; (e) McDonnell XF-85 (Goblin); (f) Leduc 021; (g) Chance Vought XF5V-1 (Flying Pancake). Illustrations not to scale.

Chance Vought XF5U-1 (Flying Pancake) Fig 1 g. This naval fighter was based on a roughly circular platform wing and was developed from an earlier similar design, the V-173 Flying Flapjack. Apparently only a single prototype was built, but not flown.

Avro 707 series research deltas. These aircraft were built to test the behaviour of the delta configuration at various speeds and altitudes. The low speed Avro 707 B had a somewhat unusual air intake moulded on the upper fuselage between the cockpit and vertical stabiliser fin. The Boulton-Paul company was also conducting extensive research into tailless deltas in the UK at this time.

Leduc 021 Fig 1f. This was an extraordinary French test-bed for the development of a ramjet-powered interceptor. The cockpit was located in a bullet-like

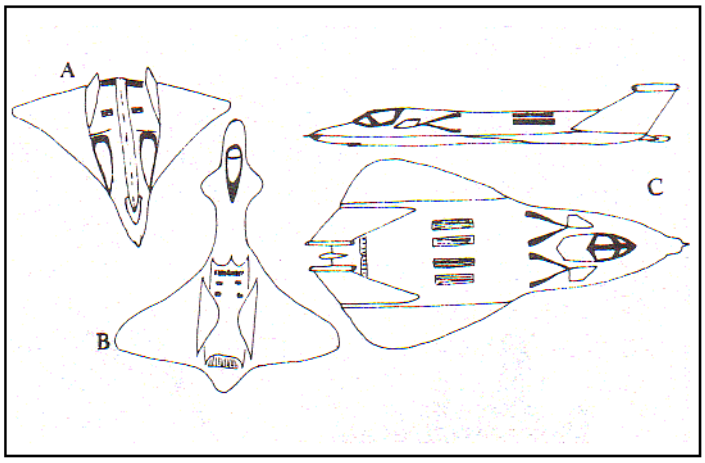


Figure 2. Possible designs of the CSIRS (Lockheed F-19 or RF-19). (a) A Soviet suggestion appearing in a 1984 issue of *Aviatsiya e Kosmonautika*. (b) A layout suggested in several aviation magazines and books. (c) The layout suggested by the Testors model airplane kit. Illustrations not to scale.

nose fairing which extended from the engine tube. Wings and the rather rocket-like three-piece tailplane were located on the sides of the engine tube which also served as the fuselage.

V/STOL projects. Early projects such as the Lockheed XFV-1 and Convair XFY-1 were intended to take-off from a vertical position. The Convair design proved to be the better of the two aircraft.

Contemporary aircraft design is likewise not short on the bizarre. The advent of computer control (fly-by-wire) systems and composite materials have allowed the development of viable technologies previously thought to be impractical. For example, computer control of highly unstable layouts is now possible as evidenced by the Grumman X29A forward-swept wing demonstrator.

While X-29A remains relatively conventional in layout, the same can not be said of some of the following design concepts:

* "X-wings" which combine aircraft and helicopter characteristics
* "Transatmospheric craft", combining elements of high altitude aircraft and the Space Shuttle
* "Scissor-wings" which possess a rotating wing which is extended at low speed but held along the fuselage at high speed when the aircraft relies on its lifting body fuselage
* "Ring-wings" in which the wings are joined above the fuselage to form a ring. The vertical stabiliser is in turn extended to meet the ring to complete the design.

In addition, various combined technology concepts also may produce some rather unusual aircraft, such as push-pull engine systems with canard wing layouts. An important review of many of these modern design concepts is to be found in "Aircraft 2000: The Future of Aerospace Technology" (Bill Sweetman, Golden Press, 1984).

Given that unconventional designs did (and do) exist, let us examine the possibility that such aircraft may be involved with "incidents" that could be regarded as "saucer crashes", i.e. result in the military activity features noted above.

Case 1: the Stealth Fighter

On July 11 , 1 986, "something" impacted with a wooded hillside near Bakersfield, California. Military personnel were quick to arrive in the area which was then cordoned off to unauthorised persons, including local landowners. Television news footage (shown on Channel 9 in Brisbane) showed covered trucks leaving the area under guard. (Features: a,b,c,d)

There was no alien body to be retrieved here. Instead, the USAF removed the mortal remains of Major Ross E. Mulhare of the 4450th Tactical Air (or Test) Group - a unit not officially listed by the USAF - and the wreckage of his aircraft. It is believed that Major Mulhare was at the controls of one of the most secret aircraft in the USAF's inventory: a Lockheed Covert Survivable In-Weather Reconnaissance Strike aircraft. The CSIRS is also referred to as the F19, RF-19, Stealth Fighter, Spectre, Ghost or Ghostrider in various publications.

Much of what has been written about the CSIRS is speculative but the following points are generally agreed upon:

1. At least fifty CSIRS are operational 2. At least three crashes have occurred
3. The concept demonstrator aircraft (XST) flew in 1977, and
4. The aircraft is "bat-like" and highly manoeuvrable.

The CSIRS is a subsonic aircraft which incorporates low visibility, low infrared signature and low radar signature features and relies heavily on high-tech composite materials to achieve many of these ends. Wing and fuselage are blended, air-intakes and exhausts are "hidden" in the fuselage layout and vertical surfaces are absent.

The role of the CSIRS is uncertain: fighter and reconnaissance functions have been ascribed to this aircraft, hence F- and RFdesignations. [An interesting (speculative) role for the CSIRS is described in Tom Clancy's novel "Red Storm Rising".]

Very little is known of the CSIRS's external appearance, although several model kits are presently

on the market, with the Testors kit generally regarded as the most accurate.

The design philosophy for CSIRS is low visibility - and so it is as far as the public is concerned. CSIRS are crated at the production facility, loaded at night into Military Aircraft Command (MAC) transports and delivered to tesVoperational locations (eg Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada). Similar secrecy surrounded another Lockheed development, the SR-71 Blackbird. Indeed, by examining the history of the Blackbird, we can at least gain an insight into the CSIRS program.

The point to be made here is simply this: many of the stages of development and deployment of aircraft, such as the CSIRS and SR-71, if fleetingly encountered, can be interpreted as something extraordinary (which in one sense they often are).

Case 2: Remotely piloted vehicles (RPVs)

During the Vietnam War, at least one photographer from *Life* magazine found himself at the point of an American gun under unusual circumstances. This photographer was granted permission to take photographs of Da Nang airbase, but while he was photographing a C130 Hercules at the north end of the airfield, he suddenly found himself at gunpoint and having some of his exposed film confiscated. (Features: a,b,c,d,e)

The unfortunate photographer had not stumbled on a saucer recovery, rather he had photographed a highly secret Ryan Lightning Bug drone being removed from the C-130. These drones were being employed by the USAF at the time to obtain reconnaissance photographs of targets over North Vietnam. The value of RPVs for this purpose, especially over heavily targets, is obvious. Very little is known of many of these programs. The Lockheed GTD21 drone, for example, is shrouded in mystery and not a little speculation. These drones were developed in association with the SR-71 Blackbird (and associated YF-12 variant) program for launch either from Blackbirds or B52s: could these drones be responsible for press reports during the late 1960s of Mach 3 intruders overflying the USSR?

Fortunately, there is a history of the Ryan company's RPV projects available, William Wagner's "Lightning Bugs and Other Reconnaissance Drones". Space does not permit adequate review of this publication , but needless to say it supplies significant details not only on the RPVs themselves but also on development and deployment including security. Wagner's book shows that RPVs have been used in the following contexts: as research test-beds; reconnaissance; to test defences on land, sea and air; weapons delivery platforms (especially defence suppression); targets; and surface-to-surface missiles.

This is ample evidence that most nations are still involved with RPV projects - cruise missiles being one of the most controversial ones - and Israel has demonstrated their effectiveness for real-time battle management in Lebanon. Therefore, the point made at the conclusion of the previous section applies equally here.

Case 3: Aerial espionage

On August 4, 1976, an aircraft mysteriously crashed off the coast of Newfoundland. No distress transmissions were emitted. The Canadian Defence Force sent ships and aircraft to the region as did the Soviet Union. On September 22, the Soviets recovered wreckage in what was a most costly and risky operation. (Features: b,c,d)

This was neither a flying saucer or unconventional aircraft that crashed, rather it was a Soviet Tu-95 Bear long-range reconnaissance aircraft. The possibility of overflights by Soviet Tu-95/142 Bears across northern Australia has recently received media attention (eg *The Australian*, 25/1/88, pp1 -2). The existence of overflights by Soviet aircraft is not really surprising in view of Australia's status as an ally of the United States and the state of the regional defences. Aerial espionage, despite the existence of sophisticated space-based intelligence gathering systems, remains an integral part of the intelligence nets of the superpowers.

Aerial espionage may involve use of RPVs (see above) and/or manned aircraft. Aerial observation of the military exercises of the "other side", surveillance of ocean tests or electronic intelligence gathering (ELINT) along respective borders are all currently employed. For example, RAAF P-3c Orions have photographed ocean recoveries of small-scale prototypes of the Soviet Space Shuttle, while an encounter of the closest kind between a Norwegian

Orion and one of the USSR's latest operational fighters (Su-27 Flanker) has obtained significant detail regarding the latter.

Such activity, although routine, may still contribute to "incidents"; few are aware of the actual air battles and shoot-downs that occurred during the height of the Cold War, although some may still recall the name of Francis Gary Powers. Encounters may still contribute (or have the potential to do so) to unusual military activity, especially if one of the opposition's aircraft crashes or approaches too closely.

Indeed, such encounters may even contribute to claims of UFO activity as can be seen in the following case. Soviet Bears often approach Canadian air space and Canadian fighters intercept them as a result. These interceptors are equipped with very bright spotlights to identify and photograph the intruding aircraft (and disrupt the Soviet crew's night vision?).

Conclusion

I think that even this brief speculative review indicates that covert military development and operations may serve to explain aspects of the crashed saucer myth. In this regard, any "conspiracy" simply arises from the need to prevent classified information leaking into the public domain, and the need to ensure that secrets are not compromised.

In the case of the Soviet Ru-95 that crashed off Newfoundland, a spokesperson for the Canadian Defence Ministry commented: "If instead of the Soviets, someone else had found the wreckage, then the equipment on board would have been of great interest and usefulness."

Absolute secrecy can not be guaranteed. As yet no substantial evidence has come forward for any crashed saucer, yet we do have some details of the CSIRS and RPV programs, even though they have been subject to very high security. It has been acknowledged that even the highly secret XST demonstrator aircraft could occasionally be seen from public roads in the vicinity of Tonopah, the test locality!

I have not felt it necessary to discuss the existence of secret installations or secure areas within existing military bases. It is self-evident that such should exist both for covert projects and general security reasons. So, in conclusion, I would suggest that the "crashed saucer" myth is just that, a pot pourri of hoax, distortion, embellishment and possibly just enough misperception/ misrepresentation of covert military operations to provide a veneer of "truth''.

Gregory Czechura is a member of the Queensland committee of Australian Skeptics and works at the Queensland Museum.

Footnote:

Subsequent to the completion of this manuscript, a copy of *Modern Fighters and Attack Aircraft'* (Bill Gunston, Salamander,1987) was obtained. This book sheds new light onto Lockheed's CSIRS (or COSIRS). It is thought that a "three figure number" of these aircraft are now in service. Apart from details of construction, powerplant, etc, Gunston reports that experiments have been conducted by which the canopy is replaced by a "synthetic cockpit" in which TV and forward-looking infrared sensors "see" the outside world. Sightings of CSIRS have apparently been reported (October 1985 onwards) in Britain (including daytime sightings at RAF Binbrook), Japan and Alaska. CSIRS are carried in C-5 transports for operational deployments, and to this end have power folding outer wings (i.e. they may not be crated)

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(Also numerous articles in journals such as Air International, International Combat Arms, Military Technology, Flight and Aviation Week were also consulted.)

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Book Reviews
Above Top Secret: The Worldwide UFO Conspiracy

Timothy Good (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987)
Martin Bridgstock

- a review and some further thoughts

Crash! My academic mailbox shuddered with the impact. A huge package crushed the usual accumulation of memos, student assignments and abusive letters from creation scientists. What was it?

"It" was a book. *The Book Magazine* wanted me to review Timothy Good's book "Above Top Secret". I leafed through it. Nearly 440 pages of text, followed by 106 pages of appendix and 30 pages of notes. A big, big book.

I read the blurb. The book, it told me, "is the most astonishing book about extraterrestrials and their potent threat to our security ever written". This is partly because the author "logically, calmly and rigorously" examines the evidence, using a "rational, sober and immaculately documented" approach.

With trembling hands I began to read this portentous volume. With grim determination I read it. All of it. The introduction, by Lord Hill-Norton, GCB. Then the text, the appendix and the notes. It was a long, long slog.

The book's central ideas are not stated clearly. There are two of them, and they emerge gradually. One idea is that, beyond reasonable doubt, Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) do exist, and are spacecraft from other worlds. The other idea is that there is a worldwide cover-up about UFOs, with security agencies seeking to suppress the evidence. These ideas emerge gradually from the text, and are never clearly spelled out.

The bulk of the book is taken up with hundreds of cases of UFO sightings and alleged security cover-ups. The book's tone is moderate throughout, and the aim seems to be to overwhelm the reader with a tidal wave of evidence.

The book poses an interesting problem to the thoughtful reader. If its theories are correct, or even partly correct, our place in the universe is quite different from what most of us thought. What is more, a hidden network of intelligence agencies is able to conceal a major truth from all the rest of us. How should we evaluate these sensational claims?

One obvious way is that of Phillip Klass, the American skeptic. Examining outstanding UFO cases yourself, in detail, then publish the results in books, such as "UFOs Explained" and "UFOs - the Public Deceived". However, most of us do not have the time, or the resources, to investigate world-wide UFO claims of the kind Good writes about. And as for tackling the claims of cover-ups, most of us would quail at the thought.

The claims

Luckily, there are some simpler methods of assessing Good's claims. First, we can ask what exactly is being claimed. Some belief-systems wither as soon as their assumptions are spelled out. I know of many folk, for instance, who thought that Creation Science was a plausible idea, until the full range of beliefs were spelled out. The idea of Adam and Eve, the Tower of Babel, Noah's Flood and so on being accepted as scientific beliefs strikes many people as implausible. Other beliefs reveal different features. As Tim Mendham recently point out [Vol 8, No 3], the "New Age" system of beliefs is so vague that almost nothing can be said. What about Good and his UFOs?

For a start, what kind of creatures are these aliens? Good never says, but his evidence points in all kinds of directions. Both the UFOs, and the aliens who occupy them, vary wildly from report to report. Some UFOs are as small as cars while others, such as one reported in the USSR, was twenty-five miles in length! Some aliens are very much like us - they appear human - while others are very different. They may lack genitals or digestive systems. Their attitudes to us vary, too. Some are friendly and report that they come from peaceful happy planets. Others are very nasty, and fire missiles at our aeroplanes.

Good's ideas about aliens, therefore, are rather unclear. However, although this renders the claims less plausible, it does not necessarily invalidate them. There could, in principle, be lots of different aliens and spacecraft flying past the Earth. We might be seeing the galactic equivalents of hang-gliders and 747s, and aliens as varied as pygmies and circus giants. It could be true!

If it is true, though, how do we manage to spot these alien craft at all? A good proportion of the sightings are on radar screens. Yet the Americans, surely primitives in terms of interstellar technology, have finally admitted that they have built a plane which does not register on radar screens. Our interstellar travellers seem unaccountably primitive in certain respects. Again, are we supposed to believe that aliens who

have travelled from the stars can fire missiles at our planes, and miss? It would be rather like unleashing an Israeli hit squad upon a Roman legion. The aliens, to put it mildly, must be lousy shots.

On grounds of basic plausibility and coherence, therefore, Good scores badly with his UFOs. However, although implausible, his array of blundering, variegated aliens might just conceivably be true. But what about the cover-up? What can we say about that?

Good is not very clear about the cover-up either. It certainly seems an astonishing operation. We are told that American presidents - such as Jimmy Carter - tried very hard to bring UFO facts into the open, and failed. Apparently British prime ministers made similar efforts, and also failed.

Remember that this is a world-wide conspiracy. Iran is diligently covering up the facts. So is France. So is New Zealand. So is everyone. Exactly how every single one of these countries, all fiercely nationalistic, sustains such a conspiracy of silence, remains a mystery after reading the book. Surely at least one nation in the world would blow the truth at some stage?

Still, none of this is vital. We may grant that Good's claims are implausible, incoherent and unclear. However, the crux of the assertions lies in the evidence. Any theory, no matter how far-fetched or badly stated, must be granted credence if it is backed by sufficient evidence of an appropriate kind and quality. How strong is Good's evidence?

The evidence

Obviously, it is not possible to check all of Good's evidence. Hundreds of cases can only be assessed by a major study. However, one technique I've found is this. Take a sample of cases, and check them in depth. Given a reasonable sample of cases, a check will give some idea of the overall credibility of the evidence.

In some cases, no checking is needed. The evidence is feeble even when one reads it. For example, a case is quoted of a couple of electricity cables falling in South West England. Engineers, apparently, were astonished. The only link with UFOs is that Good's press clippings, during that period, came only from the south of England. Such evidence is hard to take seriously.

Other evidence looks astonishing at first glance. For instance, test pilot Robert White is reported as exclaiming in flight "There are things out there. There absolutely is." However, Good omits to describe what White was talking about. So I had to go to the reference (Time magazine, July 27, 1962). This revealed that White was talking about an object looking "like a piece of paper the size of my hand". That is supposed to be evidence for UFOs?!

A good deal of the evidence is rather hard to check, as it comes from publications of the UFO community. These often involve organisations with acronyms like BUFORA, PUFORG, MUFON and the like. Such researchers are usually described as "reliable", "thorough" or "experienced" or something similar. Obviously, it is hard to check such claims, both because I don't know the people and I don't have access to their original data.

However, there is another way of checking out Good's claims. We have already seen that American sceptic Philip Klass has investigated many UFO claims. Klass' books came out years before Good's, and Good has corresponded with him. It follows that we can learn much from the way that Good treats Klass' objections to the UFOlogists' claims. If Good produces strong reasons for discounting Klass' objections, that is a clear mark in his favour. However, if he neglects the problems raised by Klass, or treats them inadequately, then that is an indication that the use of evidence in the book is not reliable.

Let's take a couple of cases. What about UFOs over Iran in 1976? This is a highly dramatic case, to which Good devotes about three pages. Stripped of details. a couple of F4 jets from the Iranian airforce were scrambled to investigate some sightings of lights in the sky. Reports vary, but at least one jet suffered grave electrical failures, tried to fire a missile at something and had something fired at it. A nearby jet airliner also suffered radio failure.

Good spends most of his three pages reproducing some reports by a US Defence Attaché, and then quotes an evaluation of the report as a "classic". That's pretty well all he does.

What about Klass? Years before Good, Klass made repeated attempts to find out more. He wrote to a number of involved people, often receiving no reply, and found a sizeable number of pieces of evidence which were not contained in the original report.

First, Klass found that only one aircraft had suffered electrical malfunctions, not two. What is more, that plane had had a history of unexplained electrical faults, and the electrical workshop responsible for it was notorious for poor performance. In this context, a temporary electrical malfunction can hardly be characterised as mysterious. He also points out that the aircrews at the time were tired and rattled, and could have mistaken stars or meteors for UFOs and "missiles". In addition, Klass points out that radio faults on airliners are not unknown, and that is why they carry backup radio sets.

This is not a total refutation of the Iran UFO claims,

but it is a powerful critique. Good quotes none of this, yet some of it is vital information regarding the case. My conclusion is that the case is not fully presented in Good's book, and that it is not a reliable account of the Iran UFO incident.

Well, what about a case where Good does reply to Klass? The Socorro case, for example. In 1964, in the New Mexican town of Socorro, Police Sergeant Zamora reported hearing a roar and seeing flames. He raced to the scene and reported seeing a craft and two occupants. The object, egg-shaped, then took off, leaving marks and burns behind it.

Klass investigated this case in some depth, and concluded that it was a hoax, designed to improve Socorro's tourist potential. The town was in some financial trouble. The mayor, who was also a prominent banker, was mentioned as possibly involved in the operations.

How does Good tackle Klass' objections? By doing one thing; he quotes the mayor of the town as denying that he was involved in any hoax. That is all! Good concedes that Klass produces a number of reasons for his view, but does not meet, or indeed quote, any of them.

Notice that one is not required to regard Klass as more reliable than Good in investigating cases. Klass is simply being used as a foil, to see how Good handles criticism and counter-evidence. The conclusion is, he doesn't.

Conclusion

In a book of the size of Good's it is not possible to check all cases. However, this analysis of a number of claims seems to indicate that Good's book is not a clear, rigorous survey of the evidence for UFOs. It is a polemical volume, which seems to be devoted to making the case for UFOs, and a cover-up, seems as convincing as possible. However, inspection of the theses put forward in the book, and checking of a few cases with other sources, seem to show that the book is not reliable and its conclusion cannot be trusted.

What is going on?

Reading this book convinced me of a number of things. There is a world-wide network of UFO proponents, exchanging views and information. This may resemble, in some ways, the creation science movement whose shortcomings have been reviewed often in these pages. However, there are some similarities and some differences between the two movements.

Both the creation science and the UFO movements are, in a sense, victims of their own success. Both made considerable impact upon the public consciousness, and gained at least some footholds in the sphere of respectability. A number of investigations of UFO claims have been made, and of course "equal time" for creation science was adopted for a while in Arkansas, Louisiana and Queensland. However, both movements also suffered from this initial success. The results of the UFO investigations were negative. Creation science claims were subjected to scientific analysis, and found to be false.

This repulse, after the initial success, led to both movements acquiring or at least reinforcing a rather "paranoid" approach. The world, for these people, seems to be divided into "them" and "us". For the creation scientists, the division is between Christians, i.e. fundamentalists, who have God's world, and atheists, i.e. everyone else, who are being manipulated by the Devil. For UFOologists, the enemy appears to be an obscure network of intelligence services, constantly at work suppressing and nullifying the results of investigations.

At this point, the differences between the two movements become important. Creation science appears to be retreating inside its home base, the fundamentalist movement. As long as there are fundamentalists, there are likely to be creation scientists. Essentially, their long term role appears likely to be as specialised providers of comfort to fundamentalists. Never mind what orthodox scientists tell you, the creationists can say, we can assure you that true science supports the Bible!

UFOologists, have no such "safe home base" to which they can retreat. However, their case is intrinsically more difficult to refute. UFOlogy is largely practised by UFO advocates. People such as Philip Klass are in a distinct minority. In addition, UFO incidents are in general unexpected one-offs, which it is difficult to examine properly in retrospect. For this reason, it is much harder to bring proper investigatory processes to bear upon UFOology.

The consequence of this is that UFOlogy is likely to be with us in its current form for a long time yet. Indeed, although the movement does not have a safe home population, it seems to be almost indestructible in its present form.

Vol 9 No 3 - 1989

Unfair ... we haven't been kidnapped!

Tim Mendham

During May and June, the South Australian-based UFO Research Australia carried out a campaign to locate Australians who had been kidnapped by UFO.

According to UFORA research officer, Keith Basterfield, in letters to the press seeking out abductees, "A number of explanations have come forward for these claims. These have ranged from thoughts that they are hoaxes, mental disorders, some psychological process or that they really are ETs visiting us. Whatever the cause, the existence of such a body of reports deserves careful, scientific study."

Unfortunately, Australia seems sadly lacking in UFO abduction cases, lagging behind the USA and Europe where such cases, following the publication of "Intruders" by Budd Hopkins, "Communion" by Whitley Strieber and "Abduction" by Jenny Randles, are flavour of the year. So much so, in fact, that an abduction case featured prominently in episodes of mega-soapie "Dynasty" recently.

UFORA administrator, Vladimir Godic, said "It seems from the lack of stories that this sort of thing doesn't seem to happen in Australia."

What's wrong with Australians, we ask. Aren't we good enough for the aliens? Can we report this to the AntiDiscrimination Board? Is it something that even our best friends wouldn't tell us? But 1 use a deodorant!

To be fair, UFORA, which was set up about five years ago, is probably the most reasonable and restrained of the various UFO investigation groups in Australia. Mr Godic admits that the group was not committed to a dogmatic view that UFOs existed, and preferred to take a scientific approach to sightings and abductions. We wish them luck.

"Return to Mars - A Search for Humanity's True Origins"

Brian Crowley & Anthony Pollock
Matchbooks, South Melbourne
Barry Williams

There is a tradition of "scholarly" research, much favoured by creationists and Eric von Daniken, which begins with a conclusion and seeks evidence to support that conclusion. Inconvenient evidence is ignored.

The book under review does not follow that tradition in that no evidence is ignored. Everything is taken as supporting the conclusion that we earthlings are descended from extraterrestrials, via Mars, even though the links are as tenuous as the atmosphere of the Red Planet itself.

The authors canvas such reputable sources as von Daniken Velikovsky and Berlitz, the tribal legends of such disparate groups as the Zulus, the Welsh and Amazonian Indians, the Tarot and other occult practices. Much of the "evidence" appears to depend on the "psychic" visions of one Frances Yule who gives us many words from the original Martian.

There is a novel approach to etymology in the book, which seeks to prove that all languages stem from the same roots (Martian, naturally). The following is an excerpt:

"Language describes Mars to perfection. Why is Mars called Mars? The root or basis of Mars is mar. The Latin mar can be taken to mean 'to injure', 'to deface', as does the English word 'mar'. Another English word, 'mark', comes from the same root and also means 'to remember' (perhaps it originally meant 'remember the markings of Mars').

The root or basis of Mars is thus mar, which can also be taken to mean 'a dead or dying thing, person or persons', and also 'to crumble away as 9 ground to dust, decaying, ground down as between two millstones'. Could there be a more perfect description of Mars?"

Could there be a more perfect description of a non sequitur?

The authors ramble on in this vein for several pages, ending up with this gem: "There are some English words that may, by a stretch of the imagination, be allied with the 'mars' root, for example, 'marble': round stone, used in game where one marble must hit another to win (reminiscent of planetary catastrophe?); and 'marmalade': orange jam (Mars is orange in colour and it is noteworthy that no other jam has a particular name in English)."

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, "some stretch - some imagination".

I would like to offer the authors, gratis, a few other words to help their cause:

Marilyn Monroe - a star with a heavenly body

Marshmallow - often pink, which is a bit like red and obviously a race memory of Martian sweets

Marijuana - smoking this will leave you in a condition to believe books like this.

The authors also confuse the Greek deity Ares

(Roman Mars) with the constellation Aries to make some obscure point. Fortunately they appear not to have heard of the star Antares or they would no doubt have concluded this to be the original home of earthly insects.

It is not enough for the authors to deduce our Martian origins, based largely on the so-called lace on Mars, they seek to trace it even further back to the Pleiades star cluster, via Proxima Centauri and Sirius. None of these stellar systems would appear to be particularly hospitable to life, but to people who regard any legendary reference to rivers, oceans, walls, gates, caves, etc as evidence of space travel, anything at all would be possible.

I am in a quandary about this book. It reads like a send-up of the genre, and if that is the case, then it is not funny enough. If, on the other hand, it is intended to be a serious exposition, then it is hilarious.

This review is already too long for a book that is inherently nonsensical. It would take a book of almost equal length to point out all the factual inaccuracies and unwarranted conclusions contained within it, and really this review is only warranted because the book has had some media coverage recently.

Perhaps the final words should be left to the authors themselves in a "special note" to the Preface. "From the outset, we wish to state that we do not consider this book to be either a def initive or' scholarly' work."

I couldn't have put it better myself.

Vol 9 No 4 - 1989

Analysis of Mundrabilla Samples

Keith Basterfield

The January 20, 1988, reported encounter between a UFO and the Knowles family near Mundrabilla, Western Australia, made headline news around the world.

The Knowles family believed that a UFO had interacted with their car and say that, as a result, a black ash-like material was deposited both on the exterior and the interior of the vehicle.

Since that time, a number of samples of material taken from the car have been analysed. Details of some of these analyses have been published in one form or another. This article presents all the details of analyses known to the author, together with the first publication of the results from the Police sample.

Three sets of samples are known to have been taken. In chronological order, they were by the South Australian Police Department, the Australian Mineral Development Laboratory and the Victorian UFO Research Society.

SA Police Department

This sampling was conducted some seven or so hours after the event and some 600 kilometres from the reported scene of the encounter. It was taken by a senior constable of the Port Lincoln crime scene section who happened to be in Ceduna, South Australia, on other business at the time.

He viewed the vehicle and interviewed the Knowles family. His observations of the car were that: “The exterior of the vehicle was covered with a fine black/grey dust similar to a road film left on a vehicle in need of washing. That same dust was obvious on the upholstery within the vehicle.” Two samples were taken from the roof of the car and the boot, i.e. both from the exterior of the vehicle where the “ash” is said to have been.

After several months of negotiation, I received half of the original police sample. My portion consisted of two glass slides each 75mm by 25mm. Each glass slide had a piece of sticky tape with sample attached to it, thus the sample was between tape and glass. The sticky tape was some 75mm by 10mm.

I looked around for an analyst and eventually received a kind ofer from Stan Gordon of the Pennsylvania Association for the Study of the Unexplained. The material was thus analysed in late 1989.

The analyst wrote:

> “... mounted it with the particle side up on a scanning electron microscope (SEM) stub. The stub was carbon coated to prevent charging. The sample was examined in our Jeol 840 SEM with its associated X-ray energy dispersive analyser which can perform chemical analysis on very small particles.
>
> “I found two types of particles on the sample. One was NaCl crystals (table salt is the same composition). The other was clay particles with sodium (Na), magnesium (Mg), aluminium (Al), silicon (Si), sulphur (S), chlorine (Cl), potassium (P), calcium (Ca), and perhaps some iron (Fe) and copper (Cu). The iron and copper may have come from the chamber wall. These same elements are found in many clays. an X-ray

spectrum was taken of one particle and the spectrum is enclosed in this report along with a photomicrograph of the particle taken at 1000X. I looked at several particles and did not find any other particles of interest."

Aust Mineral Development Lab

Channel 7, the television station which intercepted the Knowles on their way to see UFO Research (South Australia), paid to have an independent analysis performed. The collection was conducted on January 22 at Wudinna after the vehicle had travelled some 800 kilometres from the scene. Besides a visual examination of both vehicles and blown tyre, a portable radiation meter was used but revealed no areas showing count rates above the background levels.

The report stated:

"The examination revealed no evidence of any significant ash or dust on the body of the vehicle or in the interior. A quantity of black dust was found on the exterior of the front wheels. The dust was also found in greater quantities on the inner surface of the wheels. Some of this material was sampled ..."

The dust samples were analysed using X-ray diffraction and emission spectroscopy techniques. Theanalystwrote:

"Emission spectroscopy indicated the following chemical compositions for the dust and a control sample taken from brake pads.

Element	Results In percentage	
	Ford	AMDEL control
Iron as oxide	43.4	80.1
Silicon as oxide	14.3	2.6
Calcium as oxide	2.4	0.5
Aluminium as oxide	2.3	0.4
Magnesium as oxide	4.6	2.9
Barium	3.5	3.3
Copper	5.5	<0.005
Zinc	2.6	0.2
Lead	0.9	003
Tin	1.9	<0.005
Molybdenum	0.8	0.006

The X-ray diffraction patterns showed the presence of the following crystalline forms in the samples:

Sample - Ford

Compound	
Magnetite	abundant
Brass	abundant
Molybdenum sulphide	trace
Quartz	
Hematite	
Baryte	
Calcite	

Sample - AMDEL control

Compound	
Graphite	abundant
Iron	abundant
Baryte	minor
Magnetite	minor

The analyses are considered to be characteristic of dust from wearing brake pads and discs. No significant foreign compounds were present in the dust samples.

Victorian UFO Research Society

On February 1, 1988, with the car in Adelaide, a distance of 1300 kilometres from the encounter scene, the Victorian UFO Research Society took samples. It is understood that their samples were taken from inside the vehicle by vacuuming the car.

Unfortunately, the VUFORS has never released a copy of any scientific analysis performed on its samples. It is known that at least two separate analyses were performed, namely one at Monash University in Melbourne and one via Richard Gaines in California. Monash University mineralogist Alf Hohmann conducted unspecified tests whose results were later written about in a mass media weekly magazine. This magazine article stated that the sample consisted mainly of potassium chloride with traces of other salts. In an interview with Bob Fletcher of Paranet, Melbourne, Hohmann stated that although potassium chloride is not an unusual substance to find, to find it in the quantity found in the sample was unusual.

I obtained a copy of the results of the testi ng conducted through Richard Haines. In a report dated June 10, 1988, the analyst examined samples:

* Of dust from the disc brakes
* Dog hair and dust, rear floor
* Rear floor dust

With the following results:

The dog hair "appears to be normal in every respect".
The dust from the disc brakes was fundamentally different in composition from the rear floor dust sample.
The disc brake sample contained iron, copper, silicon and sulphur. There was no chlorine in this sample.
The rear floor dust sample was composed mainly of fibres. Elements found here were oxygen, carbon, calcium, silicon, aluminium, with trace levels of sodium and potassium. One fibre also contained chlorine.

Comments

One common criticism of all samplings is that no-one undertook analysis of control samples of soil from the site of the encounter.
Secondly, the Victorian UFO Research Society, despite claiming to have a several hundred page report on the event, has not released it. I would hereby call on them to make it available.

Keith Basterfield is senior researcher with UFO Research Australia, based in South Australia.

Vol 10 No 1 - 1990

Book Review
UFO Abductions Finally a professional speaks

Hilary Evans

If you are one of those who has long been biting your nails in despair of ever learning what is actually happening in abduction experiences, you can at last leave your fingers in peace. For now you need no longer make do with witness accounts: instead, you are privileged to have an account of the matter from a career professional.

Dr Edith Fiore is an American clinical psychologist, with professional qualifications and career experience eminently appropriate for the task she has courageously undertaken. However, don't make the mistake of expecting one of those dry-as-dust academic tomes in which ponderous prose is made weightier still with tedious footnotes and references: the reader is subjected to a minimum of such irritation.

Moreover, just as Dr Fiore seeks to put her patients at ease from the start ("Gloria, please call me Edee", p147), so with the opening sentences of her book she reassures us that for all her professional expertise, she is a sensitive, feeling human being:

"The sun streamed in my window and onto my face, waking me earlier than I wanted on a Saturday morning in 1950. I stretched sleepily in my four-poster antique walnut bed ..."

How skilfully, in those few simple words, the writer gives us a quick sketch richly evocative of her values, her social status and her taste, helping us to judge from what perspective to evaluate what follows. What happens to disturb her Saturday morning lie-in, all those years ago, is that a houseguest lends her a copy of Keyhoe's "Flying Saucers are Real"2 which she rapidly reads and immediately decides that, yes, flying saucers are real - a conviction which the passing years have only confirmed.

Some might be surprised that a mind first sharpened to rapier-like acuity at Goucher College, then honed at the universities of Maryland and Miami, and finally tried and tested in a succession of mental health and psychiatric clinic posts, should be so readily persuaded by a work which is generally considered somewhat less than convincing by serious UFOologists. We must suppose the same superior education enabled her to discern the truth underlying Keyhoe's naive narrative, just as she is able to perceive the reality embedded in the stories recounted by her patients, stories which to less discerning listeners like you and me might seem mere fantasies created by the subconscious mind.

Breakthrough at Big Sur

For years, Dr Fiore's interest in flying saucers remained to one side of her career, not interacting with it. The turning point came in 1972, at a weekend seminar at the Esalen Institute at Big Sur. The location, like the walnut four-poster, is not an irrelevant detail, for how much it tells us about Dr Fiore, that she was the kind of person who would seek to extend her mental and spiritual scope by attending a seminar whose 'fringe' character might have discouraged many of her professional colleagues!

At Big Sur, she tells us, she "stumbled onto hypnosis accidentally". To some it may seem surprising that her studies had not already included at least a passing acquaintance with the phenomenon of hypnosis; no doubt a taboo on the subject of hypnosis was in operation at every one of the establishments at which she obtained her education, to the point where she and her fellow students dared not so much as whisper about it over mugs of cocoa in the dorm. Be that as it may, hypnosis having been stumbled upon, Dr Fiore

was quick to realise its potential for her work. Thenceforward, professional career and private interests converged as she began to specialise in age regression via hypnosis, and particularly in regression of patients who believed themselves to have been in contact with extraterrestrial aliens.

In those beliefs, Dr Fiore herself believes implicitly, and for the best of reasons: she herself has had such contact! "I had been floated out of the bedroom in my condominium in Lost Gatos into a spaceship ..." (p.xvii). Do not suppose, however, that she allows her personal conviction to override her scientific training: in her 'suggested reading' list which replaces the more formal bibliography, you will see books by Jung, Rogo and Rimmer, each offering an alternative to face-value interpretations.

However, it would seem she found weightier arguments in the books which make up by far the greater part of the list, works not only by her guru Keyhoe but also by such notables as Brad Steiger, Erich von Däniken, Ruth Montgomery, et al. Some might think no one with pretensions to scientific training could take such books seriously; again, we must applaud her ability to rise above the naive lines which, for simple-minded folk like you and me, separate fact from fiction. It is in the perspective of this blithe commitment to face-value acceptance of her patients' stories that her book must be judged.

The Weight of Testimony

The bulk of it consists of transcriptions of dialogues between Dr Fiore and her patients. These are given verbatim, largely from tapes (though in some cases, e.g. p10, a substantial part of the testimony seems to have been given before the tape was slipped in the recorder, so we are indebted to Dr Fiore's excellent memory for detail). Presumably too, they are given in their entirety, with the exception of such parts as Dr Fiore may have thoughtfully omitted to spare us reading portions which are irrelevant or superfluous.

The bare narrative is dressed with 'stage directions' which help to 'humanise' the scene. We are informed when Sandi's brows crease (p11) or when Diane's face lights up with a mischievous grin (p276); sometimes Fiore goes farther still:

"Dan's voice had become softer, filled with emotion. I wouldn't have been surprised to see tears brimming in his eyes."

A captious critic might suggest that by putting the idea into our minds, Dr Fiore risks giving the impression that Dan cried when in fact he didn't; but others will surely see it as an indication of her delightful ability to empathise with her patients, so rare in these days when a cold scientific detachment seems to have replaced the traditional 'bedside manner'. No one could accuse Dr Fiore of detachment. However, critics may voice another doubt, wondering whether perhaps it diminishes the evidential value of the testimony that all of it was elicited as the result of questioning by Dr Fiore herself, committed as she is to a specific set of beliefs. Generally, there is no one else present, and in the rare cases when there is, the third person does not participate.

Such criticisms might have force if it resulted in distortion; but in fact her patients' accounts faithfully mirror similar stories recounted by other abductees - proof, if proof were needed, that the stories recounted by Dr Fiore's patients are just as genuine as any other abduction accounts.

Connoisseurs of the genre will find themselves on familiar ground as they read of the white egg-shaped room in which the abductees are liable to find themselves, very bright, with no visible source of illumination (p161); or of the probes inserted in the abductees' bodies (p171); or the messages addressed to mankind by the aliens:

"... if we can love those things [animals] that are evolving towards the light, that will enable love to come to us more ... if we can learn these lessons, we can go on into a different vibration where we will be able to drop the heaviness of physical form and travel among the stars, free of disease, free of pain ..." (p287).

The reader will perhaps be surprised that Dr Fiore is not surprised that most of her is patients either display a strong previous interest in UFOs, or are psychic, or both. Thus Mark tells how he was fascinated by Whitley Strieber's book "Communion", though not to the point of actually reading it (p35); Tom, on the other hand, did read it, and it reminded him of feelings he'd had ever since he was a boy (p68). Ted has been interested in UFOs "all my life" (p133); Gloria has recently attended a two-day seminar with Richard Haines on 'close encounters of the fourth kind' (p147); Dan has "always had a deep and abiding interest in UFOs. Ever since I was a kid, I was interested in exploring beyond this earth every time I look at the night sky, I have a nostalgic feeling, really at a gut-level, that I want to go home". (p230)

Did Dr Fiore consider the possibility that such previous obsessions might generate a state of expectation, whether hopeful or fearful, which might trigger a fantasy? If so, clearly she did so only to reject it. Nor does she feel the need to address herself to the question, why do so many of her patients incline to the psychic? Thus Barbara says "I'm psychic! I've been sensitive that way ever since I was a kid" (p53). Dr

Fiore does not find it inconsistent with her scientific approach to say of patient Linda that she is "very sensitive psychically" (p89), or that Diane has "been a gifted psychic since childhood" (p274). Though she does not define what this quality is, I think we all know what she means.

Is so high a proportion of UFO-sighters and psychics normal among patients requiring psychotherapy? Or does Dr Fiore meet an exceptional number because that is the kind of referral her colleagues pass on to her? Or is it because she has the ability to discern, where less perceptive colleagues might not, that beneath the surface of a patient's story lie telltale indications of an extraterrestrial encounter? The question must remain unresolved, for Dr Fiore herself does not address the issue: it is for us to wonder whether, had these patients taken their troubles elsewhere, they would have been diagnosed in the same way.

For after all, when all is said and done, what is important is that Dr Fiore knows how to respond to these stories. So, when Tom tells her of his childhood feelings, quick as a flash comes her gut-reaction diagnosis: "Tom, it sounds like you may have had a contact and what's happening is that whenever you're in a similar situation or in any way you're reminded of it, you are actually reliving what you once felt", from which the consequence follows, again without a moment's hesitation, "The very best thing we can do now is a regression" (p69).

Most accounts of contact with extraterrestrials have been written either by the abductees themselves (eg Strieber) or by non-professional investigators (eg Budd Hopkins), and consequently lie open to objections by sceptics (see, for example, reference 3). Fiore's book, in contrast, comes to us with all the weight of a qualified medical practitioner with years of clinical experience. We who have long been puzzled by the phenomenon are fortunate that a scientist has at last had the courage to speak out, frankly and fearlessly. More fortunate still are those patients who find their way to Dr Fiore's consulting room, for it is highly probable that had they not done so, neither they nor we would ever have known that they had been abducted at all.

Ms Evans is with the Mary Evans Picture Library, UK, and is a contributor to the British & Irish Skeptic

References

1. Edith Fiore, "Abductions: Encounters with Extraterrestrials", Doubleday, N.Y., 1989.
2. Donald Keyhoe, "Flying Saucers are Real", Fawcett, N.Y., 1950. With her fine attention to detail, Dr Fiore tells us she was given a hardcover book, which is surprising, since the book was not published in hardcover in the US. No doubt her friend had obtained a copy of the hardcover English edition, in which case I hope she still has it since it is now a rare collector's item.
3. Hilary Evans, "Abductions in Perspective" in British & Irish Skeptic, 1:5.

Vol 10 No 3 - 1990

Skeptics supremo in UFO non-abduction SHOCK!

Barry Williams

On September 4, 1990, at approximately 0450, while travelling between Mt Tamborine and Beaudesert Qld, en route to my home in Sydney, I observed to the north west a bright green light. When first observed, this light was 2-3 degrees above the horizon towards which it rapidly descended. The event took less than one second. I have never previously observed any similar phenomenon. On arrival in Sydney some 13 hours later, I had completely forgotten the event. I was concerned that my journey from Mt Tamborine to Sydney had taken more than one hour longer than had the reverse trip, four days earlier. I was also suffering from a severe pain in my right knee.

My memory was jogged later the same evening when at approximately 2015, while feeding some apple to a possum on my garage roof, I observed a bright meteorite trail in the western sky.

At this stage, I was faced with a dilemma. Should I parley a strange green light, a missing hour and a pain in the knee into a best selling book, a film contract, fame and fortune, or should I remain a sceptic? Clearly green lights in the sky are unusual, missing time is a staple of the alien contact genre of UFOlogy, as are physical discomfort and memory lapses. Abductions of Australians by the denizens of Sirian space craft are sufficiently uncommon as to cause querulous comment from local UFOlogists. The abduction of an office bearer in a sceptical organisation must certainly

be unique.

On the other hand, the pain is more easily explained by my pressing on an accelerator for fourteen hours with a foot, the associated knee of which is arthritic. The missing time can be accounted for by a weekend trip to Queensland, with a noticeable lack of semi-trailers on the New England Highway, not to mention a complete absence of road works, being compared with a Tuesday trip back in which both time wasters were prevalent. The memory loss may properly be ascribed to the event having occurred in the first hour of a fourteen hour drive, which had left me in a condition described in the best medical text books as "knackered".

But what of the green light? As a former member of the RAAF, I knew that it was not a starboard navigation light of an aircraft; it did not look like a flare and as an amateur astronomer, I knew it was not any celestial phenomenon with which I was familiar. What could it be?

One of the advantages of being an Australian Skeptic is that you have access to people who know what they are talking about. I made a quick phone call to Prof Colin Keay, president of the Hunter Region Skeptics and professional astronomer at Newcastle University. Colin, whose specialist field includes meteorites, told me that the green colour indicated the combustion of oxygen by a fairly large meteoroid close to the earth.

Visions of riches beyond the dreams of avarice vanished in a puff of reason. There will be no headlines in the sensationalist media. I guess I will have to be content with being the first president of Australian Skeptics to have had a Close Encounter of the Subsequently Identified Kind.

As I have often said, there is no money in being a Skeptic, but it is lot of fun.

Vol 10 No 4 - 1990

Woman's Daze (Again) - the UFO connection

Barry Williams

Woman's Day magazine continues to enlighten its readership with high quality stories from the cutting edge of scientific endeavour. In the October 16 issue, a story entitled "*Visitors from Space*" presented the views of Colin Norris, Adelaide based director of Australian International UFO Research Incorporation. Mr Norris who, according to the article, has "*several safes and filing cabinets*" filled with evidence "*that aliens are present on earth*", did not present any of this evidence (or if he did, the magazine failed to mention it). We are assured that he is "convinced" that the aliens will make their presence better known soon and that the governments of the USA and the USSR know a lot more about alien life than they are letting on.

Mr Norris also seems to be convinced that Australians are not being ignored in the rash of UFO abductions, despite complaints reported here a year ago (*the Skeptic* Vol 9, No3), that very few Australians had experienced this interesting phenomenon. He cites four cases of people who have suffered from various conditions that convince him that they have undergone alien experimentation.

The first was a woman "*who has seen entities in her home*" and who has subsequently "*suffered terrific sweats which are akin to raging fevers*". The second concerns a man who woke up to see a spherical light in his hallway and, after investigating and returning to bed, found that "*his toes suddenly lit up and glowed in the dark. It was like he had torches attached to his feet.*" Now that is something we should seriously hope that the aliens will persevere with. No more stubbed toes while going to the toilet late at night.

The next case seems to demand an investigation into the practice of the registration of doctors in South Australia. Mr Norris cites a man whose "*entire face has become covered in strange black moles*". He then states "*The only explanation doctors can give is that he's afflicted, belatedly, by birth-marks*". "*This, of course, is quite ridiculous.*" says Mr Norris, and who would argue with him? So, if any of our SA readers are suffering from sudden outbreaks of black moles, don't worry about melanomas. The prevailing medical opinion in your state would appear to favour birthmarks, while more rational commentators suggest that they are evidence of alien visitations. (You could, of course, go interstate and get a second opinion).

The final case is about a "*young woman (who) woke one morning with three pin-pricks on her forehead. She then developed a lump the size of a tennis ball*", which subsided leaving three pock marks, "so big you can place your little finger in them". If that sounds to you like an insect bite that became infected then you clearly have no romance in your soul.

At the end of this article, Woman's Day invites readers to send in their UFO experiences, the best of which would be printed. Naturally, I sent in a copy of my UFO non-abduction story (Skeptic Vol 10, No 3),

together with a covering letter. Within a week, I received a response which said that the Letters column had already been set and my story would not be published. I was entirely unsurprised.

Circles

Barry Williams

In this issue we look at the phenomenon of crop circles from two different perspectives. One of our authors strongly favours the hoax hypothesis, while the other leans towards the possibility that the climatic cause, proposed by Dr Terrence Meaden, may explain at least some of the circles.

There is a good chance of course that both views are correct. Some of the circles may indeed prove to have been caused by micro-bursts or vortices of wind, while the remainder are likely to be the work of human agencies, seeking to hoax the investigators.

As sceptics, it is right for us to keep open minds until there is sufficient evidence for us to reach an informed decision. If evidence is adduced th at vortices can produce patterns in standing crops, the sum of human knowledge will have been advanced and we should not dismiss that possibility.

That having been said, there is little reason for us to suppose that the more esoteric explanations should be considered to be even remotely likely. Psychic forces and UFOs are not reasonable explanations for any phenomenon, simply because there is no acceptable evidence that such things even exist.

Little credibility should be given to the claims of the proponents of the various hypotheses, "*That hoaxes can be ruled out*". How can hoaxes ever be ruled out? There is no laid down set of rules which states just how one must make a fake crop circle. Given the task of making a circle in a crop, twenty different individuals will almost certainly achieve twenty different results. And I suspect that that fact probably accounts for the vast majority of recent sightings.

Book Review
Round and Round in Circles

Steve Roberts

Circular Evidence
Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado
Bloomsbury, London, $35.00

In my early years in Southern England, children would frolic in the corn, making a path through the crop which could later be explored and extended by others. Ah, those childhood summers; now my village has become a suburb of London and the kids spend their spare time adorning the trains with spray-painted graffiti.

Messrs Delgado and Andrews have filled their book with many delightful photographs of bucolic southern England at the height of successive summers of the 1980s; in each photograph, a clean-cut circle (or more elaborate shape) of the crop lies mysteriously pressed to the ground. They also report some predictable reactions from apoplectic farmers who were clearly undazzled by the beauty, or mystery, of these sudden events in their cornfields.

Crop circles (the general name we shall use for the phenomenon of powerfully swirled and flattened areas of standing crops) are always formed, in their entirety, overnight, always at the time of year when the crop is just due for harvesting, when the crop is highest and the circles appear at their best. They are usually not perfect circles, but slightly elliptical. They tend to appear conveniently near, but never too near, the road along the edge of the field. Furthermore, they tend to appear repeatedly and only in certain fields, especially fields which are easy to see, such as in valleys, or overlooked by hills; and all these fields are in the same area of central southern England.

The authors of this book analyse all conceivable (and quite a few inconceivable) causes of the phenomenon, except the obvious one. Even when an identical hoaxed circle appears right next to a "mysterious" ones (p.40), they do not even attempt to describe how the hoax circle was made. This would have been highly relevant to any description of other possible mechanisms, but they hastily move on (in the same sentence) to another circle, not known to be hoaxed.

The authors do, however, consider the possibility of hoaxes, devoting most of pages 154 and 155 to it, plus four lines on page 82. Wow! The profundity of their analysis leaves me gasping; for example, they believe that, if a 1 metre circle could be manually formed by a 1 metre wooden rod, then a 10 metre circle would

require a 10 metre rod, which would be much too heavy and unwieldy; ergo ! There are some diamonds among the dross, however. Probably the only two scientifically useful statements in the book are that the crop flattening force in one case has a convenient width of 0.33 metres and the weight required to press a 1 metre width of crop to within 5cm of the ground is given as 15 kg, if swept over the crop once.

A deeper analysis, which was not made by the authors, of the published photographs begins to shed some light on the mysterious "force" which makes the crop circles. All the crops feature "tramlines" about 20 metres apart, made by tractors carrying crop spraying gear, driven so as to cause minimal damage to the crop. (The authors found the tramlines very useful for approaching the circles, without leaving tell-tale paths across the crop; I suggest that so did the mysterious "force" which made the circles.) The majority of the crop circles shown in the book are accurately tangential to a tramline, say within half a metre. Another 20% of the crop circles are located with tramlines exactly through the middle. This leaves about 20% of the crop circles outside these categories; of these, many possess a beautiful, and unnecessary symmetry with respect to nearby tramlines.

Some circles have "tails" or "panhandles", and in both cases shown, these happen to run exactly so as to fill in the space between a pair of tramlines. The authors have not commented on this fact, but look at pages 54-57 and you can see it for yourself; the panhandle is not even aligned with the centre of the circle. Patterns of five circles also occur, having a large central circle surrounded by four smaller ones, approximately at the corners of a square. When this formation occurs, a path can usually be seen, concentric with the inner circle and joining the centres of the outer circles. Funny that.

The flattened crop within the circles can be swirled in various directions, spiralling tightly or loosely, clockwise or anti-clockwise. Up to three layers of different swirling have been found, presumably resulting from the mysterious force changing its mind, or trying to get the right pattern. Quite a few big circles have a separate outer ring, a metre or two wide, swirled in the opposite direction. Although the crop is usually pressed down very hard within the circles, there are very few reports of ground damage or of uprooted plants; the crop is usually sharply bent over just above ground level. However, the book contains very few close-ups of the broken plants, and none at all of the damage to the stalks or of exactly how they are broken. Some circles have a spectacularly different texture from the rest (for example, that on page 108), but this factor is insufficiently explored.

All the crop circles shown in the book could have been made with a variety of hand-held farm or garden implements. The equipment would have had to be carried in and out of the field secretly, reasonably quietly, and in the dark (lights have been seen in association with the formation of crop circles); more than one person may have been required, depending on the technique. Tramlines would give easy access to all parts of the field; despite the authors' failure to do so, it is quite possible to traverse short distances of crop without disturbing the plants, if care is taken.

The book concludes with sections on techniques of measurement and a section of possible theories, ranging from the absurd to the hilarious; some are quite literally off the planet. There is some objective baloney with a swinging pendulum, and a shockingly bad "scientific" section; if you believe any of what the authors describe as science on page 169, then believing that crop circles are the result of mysterious forces is the least of your problems. The (mercifully few) references at the end of the book come entirely from the canon of pseudoscientific literature, featuring such masters of scientific analysis as Arthur Shuttlewood and Gary Kinder.

The authors are desperate to preserve the mystery at all costs; references to Iron Age relics and localities and modern-day secret military installations, with all of which the area abounds, are included as often as possible and left as vague as possible. When the authors meet an army major on manoeuvres, who gives them his name, and find no trace of him at the first place they try, they create a good mystery by not bothering to inquire further. Trivial malfunctions of tape-recorder and camera (see page 92 for a perfect example of lens flare) are given mystical connections, and this also enters the authors' minds when their friend trips over a length of old fencing-wire. A psychic medium was brought along to help investigations, but she "thought the circle felt as though she should remain towards the outer rim and not explore the centre", which tells us something about her, rather than about the circle. UFO experiences seem to abound in every cornfield. Even God ispestered to provide a further mystical experience, and obliges with a rather poor one (page 66).

The scientific credentials of the authors should leave the reader wondering too. When Colin Andrews' elaborate home-built burglar alarm malfunctions, he consults a psychic for explanations. In 1989 he was spreading rumours that swirled crops were of similar importance to the ozone hole and the greenhouse effect, at the height of the public hysteria about these

issues[1]. Pat Delgado has been desperately trying to get his name into the annals of science, by reporting a spurious phenomenon as the "Delgado effect". This phenomenon had already been reported elsewhere[2], most notably by Martin Gardner in his famous Scientific American column for April 1975 (to be exact, for April 1, 1975). The authors have claimed that they were "working with 35 scientists"[3,4] but, on investigation by the British Skeptics, these 35 scientists dwindled to a single laboratory technician, working in his own time.

A sceptic might be struck by the similarities between the phenomena of the sudden appearance of crop circles and of graffiti on trains; both of these markings appear suddenly at night, appear repeatedly in the same places, involve perpetrators who are very rarely observed or caught, and are done, not for publicity but, presumably, to satisfy an urge to leave one's mark on something. Crop circles, occurring at the height of the summer "silly season", when the weather is hot and sunny, Parliament is in recess, and everybody is on holiday, are a gift to the British Press at a time of the year when there is no other news. Press reports on train graffiti would not be so acceptable.

The authors have also visited and photographed the words "We are not alone", written between tramlines, using the same technique as is used for flattening crop circles, but have not included this in the book[5]; to do so would have brought down all their theories with a crash. Actually, it is too late; no amount of rational explanations now will convince the faithful.

For people who are interested in the phenomenon of crop circles, this volume is one of the best out of the few available on the subject. This recommendation is largely for the photographs, mostly aerial ones. The text is uninformative and contains barely enough information to be worth reading.

References

1 Quoted in The British & Irish Skeptic, March/April 1990, pp 15-20.
2 ibid
3 Sunday Times, 9 July 1989, p B18
4 Wales on Sunday, 30 July 1989
5 (UK) Telegraph Weekend Magazine, June 1989, pp 24-28

Flurry in the Corn-Fields

Dick Champion

flurry, n. a sudden blast or gust: agitation: bustle

The latest bustle on the crop circle phenomenon, running for about two months, appeared mainly in the columns of *New Scientist (NS)*. (If you are a *NS* regular, then read no further.) It began with an article by Terrence Meaden (*NS 23 June, 1990*), whose qualifications deserve attention. According to the *NS* footnote, he is a former associate professor of physics at Dalhousie University and has been a "vortex watcher" for 30 years. In 1974 he founded TORRO, the tornado and storm organisation, in 1975 the Journal of Meteorology and in 1988 CERES, the circles effects research group. He has written two books on crop circles.

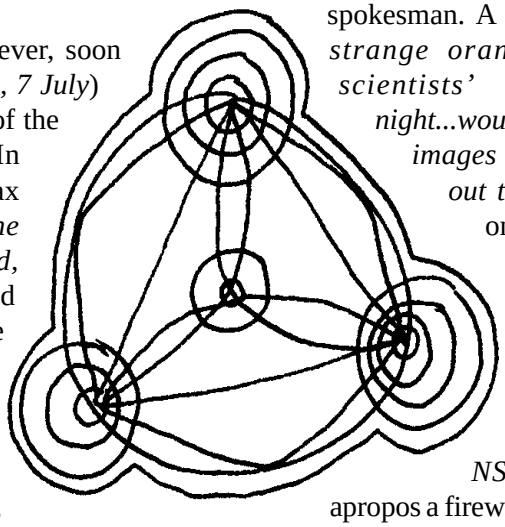
Meaden noted that crop circles are frequent summer phenomena not only "*beneath the north facing chalk scarp of Salisbury Plain*" but also across Southern Britain and as far north as Grampian in Scotland. Especially as a consequence downward moving lights, he said they have also been observed in France, Japan, Australia and the US. The earliest reference to them that he knows of "*goes back to the Middle Ages, when 'mowing devils' were held responsible*".

Now the agitation began for most Skeptics of my immediate acquaintance who have a view about them, i.e. crop circles are the product of hoaxers. But now hear Meaden: "*There is no possibility that all these complicated patterns are hoaxes...Everyone who examines flattened circles on site is impressed by the swirling spiral pattern of the corn, the many interwoven layers, the twisted straws and the double centres so often seen - evidence enough to demonstrate how impractical it would be to make them*". No, for Meadem "*the answer comes from the interaction from air flowing in the few hundred metres above the ground and the topography. The flow of air can become turbulent downwind of mountains and hillsides, and form small-scale vortices. When these eddies break down, they can move close to the ground and sweep out circles in the crops. If the spinning air builds up an electric charge, this neatly explains the humming noises and lights that eyewitnesses have recorded when they have seen the circles form*". And so we have Meaden theorising with a flurry, a sudden burst or gust.

The agitation continued, for Meaden soon had to defend his views at an international conference on crop circles held at Oxford and, in the process,

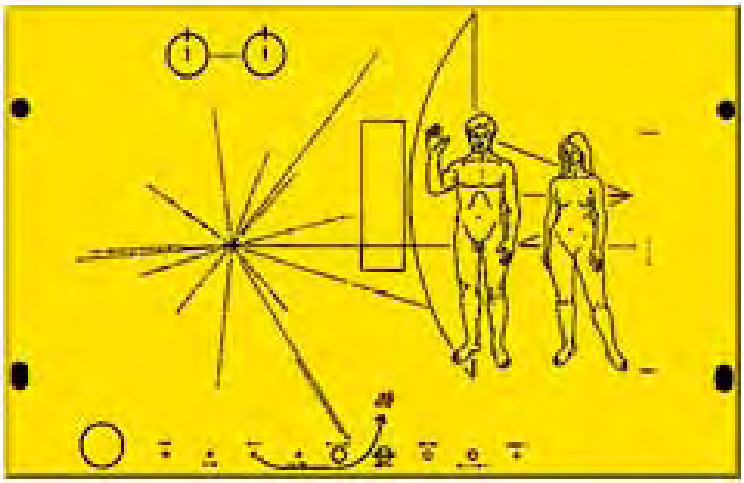
"*attacked 'self-publicising and unscientific investigators' who misleadingly attribute the phenomenon to UFOs and other extraterrestrial activity*" (*NS, 30 June*). Had he been at the conference, one Skeptic I see frequently might have dismissed the vortex hypothesis out of hand (as he did to me) by claiming that no wind could achieve the 'one millimetre accuracy' observed at the edge of crop circles; I find it intriguing that there has been no other mention of this point in the flurry. On the contrary, a leading Japanese physicist at the conference saw the need for "*new theories...to account for the electromagnetic properties of vortices...to elaborate on the processes that produce charged particles in swirling air*".

The direct counter punch, however, soon came in a Letter to the Editor (*NS, 7 July*) from Nicholas Albery, Chairman of the Institute for Social Inventions. In tentatively subscribing to the hoax theory, Albery suspected that "*the circles are the work of dedicated, artistic hippies*" who would presumably have no trouble producing the rectangular 'circles' that run counter to vortex theory, especially "with tractor tracks leading conveniently to them". He posed a series of questions: "*Why, for instance, have the circles been mainly sighted since 1980? Why are they growing in number, size and complexity each year? Why did none appear during a 14-night 'circles vigil' only to appear the night after the vigil ended?*". Having explained "*authoritatively why the corn in the ring was always swirled in a different direction from the corn within the circle*", why was Meaden contradicted "*on the very day of (his) publication, by a new type of circle, with corn in both the ring and the circle swirled in the same direction*" ? But Meaden had an ally in Ralph Noyes of the Centre for Crop Circle Studies (CCCS) (*Letters, NS, 21 July*), not to be confused with CERES. He referred to over 1000 circle cases having been reported since 1980 in over a dozen other counties in England and Scotland as well as in Australia, Canada and the US. He claimed that the few hoaxes detected are easily distinguished from the real thing, which "*are rarely circular but depart, sometimes markedly, towards the oval or elliptical; the heads of the flattened grain are left undamaged and continue to ripen; the disturbance of the crops is often very complex in the 'swirl' pattern it exhibits; and, from time to time, two different layers of disturbance are seen, one lying above the other. None of these features is easy to copy*". According to Noyes, the CCCS shares Meaden's antipathy to the hoax hypothesis, doubts the vortex theory, and joins Meaden in wanting a lot more research.



In the meantime, according to an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (*26 July*) a group of scientists from Britain, Japan, West Germany and the US, "*equipped with sophisticated monitoring equipment and helicopters*", were hoaxed. Enthusiastic about their photographs at first, on a close look they found ouija boards and crosses in the circles, crudely trampled corn, with "*none of the features which we recognise in the genuine thing*", said their spokesman. A BBC report expected "*that the strange orange lights captured on the scientists' thermal film during the night...would turn out to be only the heat images of the human beings carrying out their prank*". In any case, even one successful hoax, verified by a following confession, would not prove that all crop circles are hoaxes, contrary to the belief of some Skeptics close to home. The point is well made in a letter to the editor of the *NS* (*28 July*) by Alan Worsley, apropos a firewalk done by the Wessex Skeptics. He notes that a "*counter-demonstration to a suspected false-positive*" does not mean that "*anybody can do it, with or withouteffectivefaith*", just that Skeptics know that hot wood-ash has poor thermal conductivity. He asks, as my colleagues and I do, for the faithful to walk across a bed of hot copper. By the same token, next time a 'real' crop circle is observed, let some sceptic or hippy create an identical one alongside it in broad daylight.

Returning to the New Scientist, the next blow was struck by Tam Dalyell (*29 July*), a Labour MP who supplies regular comment on science from Westminster. He was "entranced" by Meaden's article and convinced by the case for atmospheric physics. For a reason that escapes me, he was curious as to whether the circles occur in Scotland. **(He is a Scottish MP. Ed)** The Minister for Scotland, Lord Sanderson of Bowdor, assured him that they did but quoted the belief of the Science Advisor's Unit for Agriculture that "*should a needforfurther research become necessary...it would be much more appropriate to involve meteorological expertise than agricultural*". Dalyell concluded that "*this is a view that accords well with that of Meaden*" .

Now the agitation began to weaken, as if under the stultifying influence of politics. An editorialist (*NS, 4 August*) dwelt on the absurdity of an alien cause. Are the aliens so sophisticated that they can only try to communicate with us through plaited straws? Why do they bother? The trouble with the alien explanation was said to be that "*the irrational is not susceptible to rational argument (only a circular one, its seems)*". Other causes suggested by the public were ley lines, secret military manoeuvres, fairies, electrostatic charges on ripening seed heads, and secret seismic soundings from very high altitude planes (courtesy of the Ministry of Defence). The article concluded with an appeal for attention to "*some of the forces that are known to science, albeit not very well*", such as the flow of atmosphere.

The dying pangs of the flurry followed. Martyn Hughes (*NS, 11 August*) noted that "*the formation of corn circles are growing in complexity each summer*" and asked "*how long before we see a complete Mandelbrot set?*" In the same issue, dozens of flattened rings in wheat were noted as occurring in north-western Victoria but "*Steve Roberts from Australian Sceptics (sic) suspects that the rings are the work of pranksters*" (how's that for an anti-climax?). *The Sun Herald* belatedly found a paperback on the subject to review (*Circular Evidence*, Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews), with a photo larger than the text and the conclusion that "*truth is stranger than fiction*:"! An unexpected death throe was a letter reporting the observation of a ring vortex (*NS, 18 August*) which, while not mentioning crop circles, seemed to lend credence to Meaden's hypothesis by stressing the durability and versatility of the phenomenon. Back to the death, however, in a David Austin cartoon (NS, 1 Sept): one of two aliens reading the inside pages of a newspaper, with a "Gulf Crisis" headline on the front page, says to the other "*Twenty corn circles last night, and not a mention*"